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["THIS," SAID EITELLA, "WHEN SIGNED BY YOU WILL WIPE OUT THE PAST!"]

## FIRES UNSEEN.

### CHAPTER III.

It was late on the evening of the following day when Valentine reached his home. He had not halted either for rest or refreshment since he left Madrid, and now his head reeled with the faintness of exhaustion as he flung himself out of the saddle, and passing beneath the marble portico entered the silent house.

The death-like stillness and gloom which seemed to reign everywhere filled him with guilty terror, and in the middle of the vast hall he suddenly stopped short, not because his limbs, stiff and cramped with long riding, refused to carry him any further, but because he was smitten by a remembrance of his first arrival at Cemema, when in this very hall, almost on this very spot, he had been affectionately received by his cousin Celia who then appeared to him the loveliest and sweetest girl he had ever seen.

But this was no time for such retrospect, for Celia, now his wife, lay dying upstairs, and nerving himself for the first meeting with her whom he had not seen for years, Valentine was passing on when a sob out of one of the dim corners smote on his ear like a curse.

The sound was followed by a little form, and looking down with startled eyes Valentine saw his own son, Juan, a handsome dark-eyed boy of some three or four years old.

"My child! What is it?" gasped Valentine, laying his hand on the dark head, and shrinking from the answer which, though he knew not why, he felt must come.

There was a moment's silence, and then came what he waited for with a sob more bitter than before,—

"Mamma is dead. My father killed her. I heard them say so; but they would not let me into her room."

Without another word the boy turned away, and retired once more to his dim corner, and Valentine could hear his child's sobs as he himself stood paralysed with remorse which was more bitter than grief.

"Oh, Heaven!" he cried at last, wildly,

"what misery is mine? My own child accuses me, and yet it is true."

Then stretching out his hands, beating the air, as one who gropes his way in blindness, Valentine passed through the hall and upstairs.

Little Juan had told the truth when he said his mother was dead, for by degrees Valentine learned that the messenger who brought him news of his wife's illness had been unavoidably delayed, and Celia, according to the expression of her last most urgent wish, had been interred on the day previous to her husband's arrival.

The English physician, an old friend of the family who had attended the death-bed, had already left the neighbourhood, so that Valentine learned but little of the particulars of his wife's last days, for he noticed that the servants all avoided him, and except for a few questions put to Celia's maid, and answered very unwillingly, Valentine shrank from making any inquiries.

All that he learned was this, that for the last year Celia had been the unconscious victim of a disease which once having made itself known had increased with such alarming



rapidity that in a very few days it was known to all that death was inevitable.

"But if my dear mistress had been happy," added the maid, significantly, "she would be here with us now."

And hearing these bitter words Valentine turned away with a groan that testified to his late and deep remorse.

In Celia's desk, when he had the courage to approach it, Valentine found a sealed packet inscribed with his own name, and fearing, yet eager, to behold the contents he hastily broke the seal.

The packet when opened disclosed a will drawn up in a perfectly legal manner, and witnessed by Dr. Maynard and the maid Isabella.

By this document, to which her husband was named sole executor and trustee, Celia had left house and lands and money with all that she possessed of, in trust to Valentine Eyre, for their baby son, whom she wished to be known always by the name of Don Juan. Should Valentine Eyre outlive his son then all was to be his to dispose of as he pleased. For some reason the testator expressed her urgent wish that both the children should be brought up in England and apart from their father. For the girl Romola an provision had been made, but a reason was given for this omission in the letter of farewell which accompanied the legal document.

"You know, my husband," wrote Celia, "how fatal to my happiness was the possession of a large fortune. You know how heavily my father felt the want of a son to perpetuate his name until you came; and he formed a plan of which I knew nothing until on his death-bed he implored of us to let him see us made one before he died. You refused the matter to me, and I, believing that you loved me, but thinking most of my father's happiness consented to become your wife, and so the waiting clergyman joined our hands, after which my father passed peacefully away, having blessed us with his dying breath.

"You remember, my husband, how nobly you tried to play the part of a loving husband to me; but you were no hypocrite by nature, and one day in a secret place you dropped the mask and cried to Heaven to set you free from your hateful bonds. Your wild words reached my ear, and I realized that your heart and life should no longer be straitened by me. A few days passed, and then in your path you found a letter which told you that your wife was false, and as you read it I came upon you to be contented and accused in bitter words of basest treachery to which I replied with scorn that there had been no word of love or faith in our bond. So we parted, and from that hour I was dead to you as if I had never been. Now, at the last, I reveal the truth that my children may revere their mother's memory. I leave my girl untrammelled by wealth but what you may choose to provide. Dr. Maynard has been a kind friend. He may help you carry out my last desire."

The letter ran on in short and broken sentences; but Valentine could read no more. The bitterness of late knowledge and late remorse was upon him, but it was not until he found the open hillside grave in which Celia had chosen to be laid that he realized the full beauty of what he had lost. He effaced the unhappy years of his married life and went back to the time of his conship with Celia, and thinking of those happy days and his own dark future his heart cried out bitterly,—

"The better part of life was ours,  
The worst can be but mine."

One attempt, and one only, did Valentine make to see his children.

Many days had passed, solitary days, which he had spent in his own room, shrinking in exaggerated remorse from all contact with his fellow men; but at last continued isolation was more than one of his fervid, imaginative temperament could bear; and, maddened by the scourge of self-reproachful memories,

Valentine rushed forth to find some distraction from his torture.

The sound of childish voices led him to the nursery, where the children, their brief sorrow over, were indulging in a merry game, and making the four walls ring with the sound of their gleeful laughter, until, with Valentine's entrance, a sudden silence fell upon them; and, uttering a hasty word, the nurse and her underling withdrew, leaving their master alone with his boy and girl.

The two children stood shy and silent for a moment, Romola wavering between fear and longing to approach her father, while Juan maintained a defiant attitude, his dark brows bent in a lowering, sullen cloud, which completely stamped out the look of innocent childhood.

Valentine could bear the suspense no longer; but when he would have taken his little girl in his arms, Juan snatched her away with an angry cry.

"You must not go to him, Roma; he is a bad, cruel man! He killed our mother!"

Romola was terrified by these passionate words.

She broke, sobbing, from her little brother, and clasped her father's knee.

"Is that true?" she asked, entreatingly, looking up at him with dim, wistful eyes.

"It is true! But, great Heaven, what a judgment!" cried Valentine, in breath, broken tones. Then, putting the child roughly from him, he turned, and left the room, never to enter it again.

Dr. Maynard arrived in a few days, and to him Valentine poured forth his heart; but in the recital of Celia's wrongs he was so overcome, that he bowed his head on the table, and cried out bitterly,—

"Oh, Heaven! if I had not darkened her life! If I could have loved her as she loved me!"

The doctor came and laid his hand on the young man's shoulder, saying in his gruff way,—

"Spare yourself any further torture. Your marriage was truly unfortunate for both of you; but, whatever happened afterwards, you, I can swear, were not in the first step to blame. I came to you, and told you that your marriage with Celia might lengthen Don Juan's life, and affection for your uncle caused you to yield. The result is known to us both. Let us drop the unhappy subject once for all."

"I wish I could acquit myself of all wrong!" sighed Valentine, hopelessly.

"Be a man!" was the doctor's brisk retort.

"Let me see," he continued, "there are the children to be discussed. Poor Celia, I see by this letter, wished me to find some lady who would undertake their charge."

"If you can help me in this," replied Valentine, eagerly, "you will be relieving my mind of a heavy weight."

"Humph! I can help you, I suppose? But do you think it right to consign your children to the care of a stranger?"

"Celia's wishes are sacred to me," replied Valentine, "and as I told you before, I dare not meet my own children, who have been taught to regard me as their mother's murderer!"

"Tush! what humbug!" muttered the doctor, angrily; but having paced the room in silence for a few minutes he returned to his companion. "If you are determined," he said, shortly, "to carry out your wife's wishes with regard to the children I think I know of a person exactly fitted by birth and education to undertake the responsibility."

Valentine looked up eagerly, and Dr. Maynard continued.

"I think I can promise you that Mrs. Alingham will readily accept the trust, and in her care you need have no fear for the children, for they will be as her own."

These words were uttered with marked emphasis, and in a graver tone the doctor went on,—

"My friend has not only lost her husband but met with many sad reverses, with which a weaker-minded woman would have been unable to cope. As it is, the poor thing's troubles have almost broken her down, and I am anxious that she should find a safe and happy home, with the affection of children to make her forget her past sorrow."

"Mrs. Alingham," continued the doctor, "is a woman of refinement and tact, and such a bright, lovable little soul, in spite of all her troubles, that the children cannot fail to be happy with her."

"She is English, of course?"

The doctor knitted his brows a little over the question, but after a brief silence he replied,—

"No, Mrs. Alingham is of Spanish parentage; but her birth is really all that remains to her of her nationality. Her husband was an Englishman, and she has adopted his country, his language, and, to a great extent, his ideas."

"But she is a Spaniard," objected Valentine; "and it was Celia's wish, as it is now mine, that the children should grow up under the influence of English associations."

"And Mrs. Alingham will be no stumbling-block," put in the doctor, eagerly. "Her chief desire is to forget her birdland and all its associations completely; but you shall see her and judge for yourself."

"I shall not see her," replied Valentine, who shrank with dread from all contact with strangers. "Can you not manage this for me?" he added, in his most urgent tone.

The doctor frowned, coloured slowly and toyed with his watch chain, but after a while he replied,—

"I think you ought to rouse yourself and look after the interests of your own children. It would do you more good than brooding over an ill which cannot be mended."

Valentine thought his friend somewhat brutal, but refrained from saying so, and after all he reflected that this roughness of speech was only a mask for the kindest of hearts, nor was he mistaken, for having taken two or three turns through the room the doctor passed once more by the table.

"I think, for Mrs. Alingham's sake," said he, curtly, "that I will consent to see her for you, because my little friend has been through a great deal of trouble lately; and an interview with a stranger would be far more trying to her than it can possibly be to you."

Valentine was delighted; he breathed a sigh of relief, and feeling lighter of heart than he had done for many days, begged that Mrs. Alingham should be allowed to make her own terms; and promising that Valentine should either see or hear from him within the next few days, the doctor took his leave.

"I have told you that I do not approve of the plan; but there, a wilful woman will have her way."

"My dear friend, why make my lot harder for me? It is too late to retract now, but if sorrow comes it must fall alone on me."

The first speaker was Doctor Maynard, the second a beautiful dark-eyed woman of some five-and-twenty summers, but with the lines of sorrow and premature age in her face.

The two were seated together in the room of a house which looked out on the streets of a dull Spanish town; the room was a poor one, having little furniture besides the sofa on which the lady was seated, following her companion's agitated movements with a deprecating glance.

"I can only repeat my former words," continued Doctor Maynard, testily, "so I shall say no more; what would be the use?"

"My dear, dear friend—"

Doctor Maynard pulled out a large pocket handkerchief and wiped his heated brow, then striding towards the sofa, paused before it in anything but a conciliatory mood.

"Celia, I have told you, as I faithfully promised, every word of my interview with your husband. If the attitude which I have

described does not convince you that Valentine Eyre is true and noble nothing will."

Celia smiled faintly, but her smile was more mournful than tears.

"I know my husband is true and noble," she said, quietly, "but he never loved me, never could love me. I knew that his feelings are intense, and now that he believes me dead; he is the victim of an exaggerated remorse, but that will soon pass away, leaving him to rejoice in his freedom from a hateful bondage."

"Hateful bondage!" repeated Doctor Maynard, angrily. "That is the wildest delusion that ever entered a woman's brain. What your husband now feels is genuine grief for your loss—grief which will never be entirely subdued."

Celia's eyes, which had been growing dimmer and dimmer for the last few minutes, now overflowed with tears, which ran like rain down her pale face.

"Oh! spare me a little, Doctor Maynard," she cried. "Do you think that if Valentine had ever loved me he would have left me alone for three years?"

"You banished him by your own desert."

"It was for his happiness."

"It was a cruel fraud to which the last touch was put by your farewell letter. Do you know that his children have been taught to look on Valentine Eyre as your murderer?"

"Oh! Heaven forgive me if I have done wrong, but I shall do my best to rectify that error."

"Rectify in this way," cried the doctor; "go now to your husband, show him all your heart, and let the past be blotted out; that is the only possible way."

"It is impossible!" replied Celia, firmly; "and if you know all you would not suggest it. Let us say no more! But, Doctor Maynard, I yearn to see my children; when will you bring them to me?"

"Don't ask me, Celia; you have not, with all your goodness, one spark of womanly pity in your heart, and if you were less dear to me than you are I would go this moment and confess all to Valentine Eyre, so bitterly do I repent of my share in the fraud!"

As he spoke Dr. Maynard was standing with his back to Celia, so that he did not see her rise from the sofa at his words. He started when he felt the light but impressive touch of her hand on his arm.

"You did no wrong," she said in a clear firm tone. "I only am to blame; but I do not now, and never will, repent what I have done; but if you would keep me from further sin let my children come to me at once."

"Celia, what do you mean?"

"Never mind. I have pained you sufficiently; but tell me how soon I can leave this country."

"Your husband has received a letter from his father, who refuses to receive you and the children at Chanewage Court; therefore Larkesby Hall, the place which came to Valentine Eyre from his uncle, is being fitted up for your reception."

"Oh! this delay," gasped Celia, pressing her hands over her heart; "every hour which separates me from them is an age of torture."

"Suppose your husband should arrange to bring the children to you."

"Heaven forbid!" replied Celia, in an agitated tone. "I feel that I could not sustain myself in his presence; but as for recognition, I fear it not, for the dignities which I have provided would deceive even my own father."

"You are a strangely misguided woman," was Dr. Maynard's solemn rejoinder; "but at any cost I will do my best for you."

A few minutes later he took his leave, determined to use all the means in his power to bring the estranged husband and wife together; but on his return to Cemea he found Valentine absent, having left for him, Dr. Maynard, a letter urging that the children should be consigned without loss of time to the care of their new governess.

#### CHAPTER IV.

On one of the terraces at Regent's park, N.W., was a house larger than its neighbours, and standing on a piece of ground which, stretching from back and front, afforded recreation for Mrs. Julien's pupils.

The laburnums and lilacs were in full bloom, but those at the back had rivals, for the tennis ground was occupied by four young girls, who, as the balls flew hither and thither, made the air resound with their merry laughter.

Mrs. Julien's pupils were all sweet, high-bred girls, but the beauty of the establishment was Zitella, Don Ison.

From the first hour of her arrival at Bently House she had reigned supreme in the hearts of teachers and schoolfellows; and, conscious of her power, Zitella's diadem of her worshippers increased with every moment.

She devoted herself exclusively to her studies, repelling all confidences, receiving lavish caresses and flattering tributes to her beauty with the coldness of an ice maiden, and, except when there was some direct reward to be gained from the society of one or another, holding herself aloof from her young companions.

This coldness in her favourite pupil often puzzled and annoyed Mrs. Julien.

She saw that it was not the girl's true nature, for Zitella could be all things that her mood suggested; but frequently she chose to be sullen and reticent, and this was most often the case when Mrs. Julien desired some new acquaintance to be favourably impressed with the girl of whom she was both proud and fond.

Mrs. Julien sat in her open window above the merry laughter of her pupils, and while her fingers fashioned some delicate fancy work, her mind was occupied with Zitella.

"If this coldness were natural," she thought, "I should fear nothing; but it seems to me that Zitella wears it as a mask to hide her true nature, which I have yet failed to fathom; that her passions are intense and strong I feel sure, for her eyes are beyond her control, and when she is coldest they reflect the gleam of hidden fires."

By-and-by Mrs. Julien left her room, and, going to the tennis-ground, inquired for Zitella.

"Zitella!" cried the girls in a laughing chorus. "Oh, she is in the arbour reading Tasso. She thinks tennis is waste of time."

Mrs. Julien passed on with a smile to the arbour, where the amber tresses of her favourite outtrilled in beauty the golden tassels of the laburnum which drooped so gracefully above the bowed head.

"You should not remain so still, my love," said Mrs. Julien, as she paused by the girl's side.

Zitella looked up slowly from her book, and, strange to say, replied to the remonstrance of her schoolmistress with a very sweet smile.

"I have been so interested in my study," she murmured, "that I forgot the flight of time. You know, dear Mrs. Julien, how good my guardian has been to me, and how anxious I am to excel in knowledge, so that on his return he may be pleased with me."

Mrs. Julien smiled, well pleased at the tenderness of the girl's tone.

"Your guardian must be difficult to please if you disappoint him, Zitella; but there is no fear on that score, and you must not overwork, or you will repeat last year's experience, and find yourself once more recubiting at New Haugh under the care of Miss Frith."

Zitella frowned, as she had a way of doing, and bent her eyes on her open page.

"I never want to see New Haugh again," she said, slowly; "but dear Mrs. Julien, talking of Miss Frith reminds me that I have a favour to ask of you. I want you to let me go with Miss Frith this evening to see her sick sister, Marion is a sweet girl," added Zitella, hastily, "and I think my visits do her good."

"What does your guardian say to this acquaintance, my dear?"

Zitella hastily drew a letter from her pocket, and read aloud the following extract:—

"I am pleased with all you say of your friend Marion Frith. Go to see her as often as Mrs. Julien will allow. You happy child to possess the gift of scattering sunshine where ever you go."

"My guardian flatters me," murmured Zitella, with a faint smile, as she restored the letter to her pocket; "but you will let me go to-night to see Marion Frith?"

"As your guardian approves of the acquaintance I grant your request with pleasure," replied Mrs. Julien; but the last night you went you stayed too late. If you are not back to-night by half-past ten I shall send Vicars, my maid, to fetch you."

"There will be no need," replied Zitella, quickly. "I promise most faithfully to be back by half-past ten."

After a little more conversation, Mrs. Julien went indoors, only pausing as she passed by to interchange a few pleasant words and smiles with the tennis-players; but could she have stolen one backward glance at Zitella, she would have found her fiftal suspicious about the girl confirmed once for all.

With her governess's disappearance, Zitella, after carefully glancing round to make sure that she was not observed, had drawn a folded paper from the bosom of her dress. On being opened, it proved to be a letter scrawled in a careless but educated hand; the quality of the paper testified that the writer was a gentleman, the scent of tobacco which pervaded it said something for his habits.

As Zitella's glance fell on the few hasty lines her face underwent a distinct and terrible change. In the flame which leapt to her eye it was plainly revealed that beneath the cold, well-bred surface she presented to the world the heart of this girl, young as she was, had long been

"The secret food of fires unseen,"

and those, alas, not of a refining or purifying nature. Mrs. Julien had often remarked that among all her pupils Zitella was the most pure-minded and refined. Deceived by the girl's love of study—the result of mere worldly ambition—the governesses, but especially their principal, were for ever lauding Zitella's spiritual nature, and setting her forth as a model for all her school-fellows. If they could have only seen her now, with the germ of every evil passion stamped on her face, but hatred and fear dominating all, as she read the lines on the paper in her hand!

"You will be surprised to hear from me," the letter ran; "but I am in London again and want to see you. I am in debt and difficulties as usual, only that I have gone a little deeper in the mire this time; but it is not to pour out my troubles that I seek an interview. I must tell you something which, if you are sensible, you will take as the best news you could hear."

"I shall look for you between eight and nine, and remember the old address. H.B."

It would be impossible to depict the flood of evil passion which swept over Zitella's face as she read these lines. Even with them, the proof of her mad folly, before she could scarcely believe that she, with her own hand, had a year ago wilfully destroyed her own ambitious designs, swept away the splendid fabric of worldly success and honour which, from the day on which she first met Valentine Eyre, she had steadily woven for her future. As these thoughts passed through her mind her anger at herself was so great that she forgot all caution and exclaimed aloud:—

"Oh, that I could have been so mad, so foolish! I cannot believe it! It seems like some dream, that I could have been cajoled by a few loving words, a few empty flatteries, into marriage with a penniless young man!"

Zitella shuddered and dropped her hands in her lap, her own madness seemed like some horrible dream to her. She found added bitterness in the fact that at that moment her pocket contained a letter in which Valen-

time Eyre breathed a hope of soon returning to England.

"Oh, that he had returned a year ago!" was Zitella's frantic thought. "But it would go hard with her," she thought, "if she had to forego all for which she had waited so long and worked so well."

She would not forego it. To night she determined she would make some desperate struggle for freedom. She would appeal to Hugo to set her free from a marriage which was no more than a foolish freak. She did not think Hugo would need much persuasion, for she had, in spite of her folly, been only too careful to avoid all mention of Valentine Eyre.

Her spirits rose in the prospect of success, and she went indoors smiling as she thought how cleverly she had deceived Mrs. Julien with the passage which she had pretended to read from her guardian's letter.

Zitella gloried in her clever deceptions and falsehoods, though sometimes she was inclined to acknowledge that such courses were dangerous and must be given up when her worldly success was established. She thought when her goal was once reached it would be easy to purify herself from all the mud she had gathered by the way.

Immediately after dinner Zitella went away in a hansom with Miss Frith, a governess who had been at Bently House for ten years, and who was greatly trusted by Mrs. Julien.

"Number nine, York-street," had been the address which the parlour-maid at Bently House was ordered to give the driver; but when they got to Baker-street the man was ordered to drive to a house in the neighbourhood of St. James's Park, after which Miss Frith shrank back in the hansom, cowering and trembling in every limb as if in terror of pursuit or discovery, while Zitella sat bolt upright looking straight before her with languid indifference to all that was passing around, for, complaining of a slight cold, the girl, before setting out, had donned a black frock and a hood, which concealed every vestige of her hair from view; a winter cloak and thick veil completed her attire, and rendered recognition impossible.

The silence was unbroken until their destination was reached, when the door of a quiet house being opened the pair entered; and leaving her companion in the hall, Zitella passed upstairs to a room, whose sole occupant was a handsome young man who, stretched at careless length on a sofa, was filling the air with clouds of smoke.

On Zitella's entrance, however, the young man removed his meerschaum from between his very handsome lips, and hastily rising, advanced to meet his visitor with an abashed air which was in striking contrast to the girl's haughty bearing.

"So you've come," said the young man at last. He had planned to greet his young wife with a most affectionate address, but he was somewhat daunted by her chilling scorn.

"I am here in reply to your letter, Hugo," was Zitella's frigid reply; and then as if suspecting something unusual she darted at her companion a swift, lightning glance. His face told her that he had some weighty communication or daring proposition to make.

While she hesitated, wondering what sort of manner it would be best to adopt she heard Hugo say in an abrupt and rather nervous tone,—

"Do you know that this is the anniversary of our wedding-day, Zitella?"

"And so you sent for me that you might celebrate it!" was the sarcastic rejoinder.

Hugo drew his dark brows together in a frown. Zitella's words and manner galled him. He was accustomed to homage from women, and his vanity was easily piqued. If things had not been so desperate with him Zitella would have defeated her own object. Perhaps some idea of this entered her mind, for the next minute she said almost tenderly,—

"It was an evil day for you, Hugo, when you burdened yourself with a penniless wife."

The frown passed from Hugo's face, and in its place came a crimson flush which mounted to the roots of his hair. Zitella's words, with their semblance of truth and tenderness, had touched his better nature and made him almost loathe the dishonourable deed he was about to do; but, as if reading his very thoughts, Zitella, as she seated herself, said impatiently,—

"You must get this interview over quickly, Hugo. I had to scheme to come, and I have not long to stay; besides, Miss Frith is waiting downstairs."

"Confound Miss Frith!" burst from the young man's lips with savage energy. "If she had done her duty and taken proper care of you a year ago I should not have been able to deceive and beguile you as I did. The truth is, Zitella," he went on, in a hurried, ashamed way, "I sent for you to-night to confess that our marriage was no marriage, and it was fortunate for you that your duenna woke up from her dream in time to part us at the church door, for you would never legally have been my wife. I married you under a feigned name, and it was no clergyman—"

He was interrupted by a cry from Zitella, who could scarcely conceal her exultation. Hugo, interpreting the sound to denote pain and anger, would have poured forth excuses and prayers for forgiveness, but he was again interrupted.

"What is your real name, Hugo Brand?" questioned Zitella, breathlessly; and without a moment's hesitation her husband replied,—

"Bond." Then with a laugh. "It is not a very distinguished name, so you see you did not lose very much by the exchange; there's but the difference of one letter between the two."

"And you have no money, no connections?" asked Zitella, with a coldness which appalled her listener. Wild, selfish, good-for-nothing though he was, this girl's callousness was too much for him; however, he thought her attitude rendered any scruples on his part quite unnecessary. He need no longer shrink from the thought of deceiving her.

"I have neither money nor connections," he replied, sullenly, "so you see it will be better for you to help in cutting the past once for all."

Zitella's heart beat wildly. The game she had hardly hoped to win was being played into her hands. She could scarcely refrain from laughing aloud as she thought of it, but she was careful to let no gleam of joy appear in her face.

"I have been a fool!" she said at last, with feigned bitterness, "and I would that the record of my folly could be wiped out for ever."

"It is simply done," said Hugo. "We have but to agree to be strangers from this night forth—"

"I prefer a surer way," interrupted Zitella, drawing as she spoke a folded paper from her bosom. "This," she said, laying it before Hugo, "when signed by you will wipe out the past as it can possibly be wiped out. It is not likely," she added, coldly, "that either of us will ever wish to come together again; but it is well to be provided against all contingencies."

"What is it?" asked Hugo, as he glanced over the document.

"A statement proving that our marriage was not legally performed, and that when it was over we parted at the church door."

"With all my heart," said Hugo, as he rose from the sofa, and seizing a pen affixed his name to the statement which Zitella had drawn up.

"You have done wisely, my dear," was the young man's remark, as he handed back the document. "We were a pair of hot-headed young fools when we met at New Haugh last year; but twelve months have taught us wisdom, and we know that we can't live on air. I have not a penny, Zitella, for I have no rich relations, and not the smallest inclination to work. In short, I am a good-for-nothing

scamp, and it would be a vast pity for you to throw yourself away upon me."

"We part to-night for ever," replied Zitella, indifferently. Then, with a cold and hurried farewell, she left the room and hastened downstairs to communicate the news of her freedom to the unhappy Miss Frith, who, since her pupil's escapade at New Haugh, had lived with the constant fear of discovery suspended like a drawn sword over her head.

Zitella's footsteps had scarcely died away on the stairs before the man who called himself Hugo buried his face in the sofa pillow to smother the laughter which he could not suppress.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed, "I may congratulate myself on having got well out of the very worst mess I was ever in; but that Zitella should have been so anxious to get rid of me was the last thing I expected. I should feel piqued by her coldness, but that I am so happy in my release; and now for Eastshire, who knows nothing of my secret, and who, like good brother, has promised once more to pay my debts."

And as they drove back to Regent's Park Zitella remarked to her companion,—

"Now I dare to breathe freely for the first time in twelve long months. This chapter in my life is turned down, out out for ever. Hugo Brand will never trouble me again."

"You were very inconsiderate to me when you married him, Zitella," remarked Miss Frith, who could not forget that discovery of her pupil's folly would mean her ruin, because she had not looked better after her charge.

"But," rejoined Zitella, scornfully, "had Hugo Bond been the rich man I thought him, all would have been well for you; but a poor artist, very extravagant, and deeply in debt, what a fate for me! Thank Heaven that he married me under the name of Hugo Brand, and that you discovered the affair in time to part us at the church door. I think that was the best piece of work you ever did in your life, Frith; but there, let us dismiss the subject from our minds, or you will be talking of it in your sleep."

And as the hansom had stopped before the door of Bently House any more conversation was impossible.

"You are in before your time, Miss Frith," said the servant who opened the door; "but Mrs. Julien will be very glad, as this moment there is a gentleman with her who has called to see Miss de Leon."

"It must be Valentine Eyre! There can be no other visitor for me," murmured Zitella, and hastening to her room she began rapidly to divest herself of the garments which were but a disguise to her radiant young beauty.

In a very few minutes she had donned a white dress with profuse trimmings of lace which lay in dainty ruffles on the throat and wrists, had fastened a string of amber beads round her neck, and some pale half-blown pink roses in her breast, and, thus attired, she glided noiselessly into the room where Mrs. Julien was sitting with Valentine Eyre.

"I am sure you cannot fail to be pleased with your ward; but you shall see her and judge for yourself. Ah! Zitella, my love, how you startled me; but I am glad to see you back so early. Mr. Eyre arrived in London this evening, and he has been here some hours."

Zitella came forward and placed a small cold hand in that of her guardian; but though her eyes were scarcely raised from the ground she knew that the glance bent on her was one of unfeigned admiration, and in her heart she congratulated herself afresh on her escape from Hugo Bond.

"You have grown into a woman, Zitella!" said Valentine, "but his tones were constrained; he scarcely could make up his mind whether he ought to be pleased or disappointed with the girl's coldness."

"Zitella has made marvellous progress during the three years of her stay here," said Mrs. Julien, graciously; and then with kindly

tact she took her departure, leaving the guardian and ward alone together.

"You are so changed," murmured Zitella, looking up at her companion with the timid air which she knew so well how to assume.

"And you are also changed," replied Valentine, thinking more of the girl's sweet voice than his own words. "You have had enough of schools?" he queried, briefly.

"I think I have learned all that they can teach me, but," sighing, "the last of school means the end of home to me. I do not know what my future may be, but I am not afraid. Mrs. Julien will be sure to help me to get work. I know I could stay on here as a teacher, but I long for a wider sphere."

"Zitella, have you spoken of this to Mrs. Julien?" asked Valentine, anxiously.

"No, I should not have done so without consulting you, and your last letters hinted at a speedy return from Spain."

"That was quite right. Now, child, drop the subject for ever. How could you be so silly knowing that your future was my care?"

"Do you mean to let me live with you and Mrs. Eyre?" questioned Zitella, looking up into her companion's face in a childish, trustful way.

Valentine frowned and bit his lip, and when he spoke his voice was a little harsh.

"There is no Mrs. Eyre," he said, shortly. "I have been a widower for the past three years. Zitella," he added, hastily, "I shall make some plans for your future, but not to-night, you look pale and weary. I will bid you good night! Sleep well, my child!"

He took her hand, pressed, and dropped it, then bent as if to touch her brow with his lips, but restraining the impulse he hurried from the room without another word.

That night Zitella stood long at the window of her bedroom, which looked out on Regent's Park.

She knew that Valentine Eyre loved her, but the knowledge did not cause her a faster breath. Zitella's heart was as cold as if it had been beating for a hundred years, but she shuddered when she recalled the folly by which she had very nearly marred all the chances of her own life.

But the ball was at her feet now. She felt that the moulding of her future lay in her own hands, and determined that that future should be dazzlingly brilliant, she stood there coldly and deliberately forming her plans.

She would not engage herself to Valentine Eyre, but she would encourage him to hope, and meanwhile he should find her a home with Lady Fitzroy or some other woman of rank and fashion.

Zitella had a vivid imagination. She pictured herself being presented at Court, and becoming the queen of a season. Earls, marquesses, and dukes would crowd around her, and she would take her choice of the best, and Valentine Eyre was to be whistled down the wind without another thought.

And through the long night Valentine lay awake at his hotel, seeing only one face whose loveliness exceeded all his imaginings, and whose bright youth seemed a mockery to his weary and world-worn appearance.

At an early hour on the following day Valentine called and found Zitella awaiting him.

The girl looked even lovelier than she had looked on the previous night. The hard course of study which she had undergone for the last three years had impaired neither her health nor her beauty, for, combined with a form graceful as a sylph, rose the strength of a young Amazon.

"This is a holiday!" said Zitella, as she greeted her guardian, "and as all the others are out we shall be quite undisturbed as long as you can stay."

"I am glad of that," replied Valentine, "for we have much to talk of. Zitella, I have been thinking of your future. You know, my child, that I have no female relations."

"There is Lady Fitzroy who brought me over to England."

"She is not a relation."

"No; but she is an old friend, and for your sake she would gladly receive me into her house, because she is very fond of you."

Valentine's face flushed crimson at this suggestion. He bit his lip in silence for a moment, and when he spoke his words came slowly.

"When you came to me three years ago the case was urgent. I did not stay to think, but now it is different. I could not ask Lady Fitzroy to undertake your charge without confiding to her your real name and station."

"You are generous," murmured Zitella, her face and lips becoming livid. She seemed to struggle for a few moments with her emotion, and then turning hid her face in her hands.

"Oh! this is cruel to have taken me from my old life for this, from the freedom, the happy innocence—"

"Zitella!"

At the utterance of her name the girl regained her composure and drew herself up haughtily.

"Leave me," she said, in imperious tones, and Valentine obeyed her without another word.

But outside the closed door he felt that he must see her again and heal the wound which his words had made. And yielding to the irresistible longing he turned the handle softly and re-entered the apartment on noiseless feet.

He found Zitella in an attitude which at once betokened the profound humiliation her proud spirit had undergone.

She had heard Valentine's irresolute pause on the other side of the door, and faint as was the sign which there escaped him, it had reached her quick ears.

As the handle of the door turned, she sank to the floor beside a wide low chair, whose seat provided a support for her arms, and on these her lovely head was bowed, while sobs shook her slender frame and passionate words broke from her lips—words that were each as deadly sword thrusts in the heart of him on whose ear they fell.

"Oh! cruel, cruel fate," wept Zitella, "that I must leave him who cares not for me! Oh! that I could efface the past three years, and yet how sweet they were. To win his approval was my hope, his love my dream. Oh, Heaven, what folly! but I love him. I gave my life for him once, and would again."

Valentine felt that he could hear no more. One movement, a sudden turn of the girl's head, might betray his presence, and how bitter would be her humiliation in the knowledge that her heart's secret had been overheard.

Were he to reveal his love now Zitella would not be convinced that he spoke out of aught but pity. So, for her sake, he controlled the natural impulse of his heart and left the room in silence.

Zitella heard him go, and waited until the length of the hall outside was between her and the retreating footsteps. Then, rising from her crouching position, and looking like a panther about to spring, she vowed to be revenged on Valentine Eyre. He had thwarted her design, had disappointed her dearest hopes—at least so Zitella thought, in the heat of her passionate, unreasoning anger. She looked on Valentine as some malign enemy, who had wilfully crossed her plans; and she was determined to deal him such punishment as her hatred could inspire.

Her disappointment was bitter, too bitter for words or tears.

Here she was helpless and alone, further almost from the world than she had been in her forest home, for without Valentine's aid what could she do? And Valentine had told her that she being a nameless waif was not fit to mix with his fine friends; so in her fierce anger Zitella construed her guardian's words until they were magnified into the most cruel and pitiless insults. As one by one the cherished hopes of years fell away from her,

a madness of despair seized her wayward heart. She felt like one who suffocates for want of air.

Heavens! the room was stifling. She was choking! She put her hands to her throat, rending away the dainty covering of lace, then, in a wilder paroxysm of grief, rushed to the window. As she flung it open with nervous haste, she saw the garden-gate opened by a vagrant, who came slowly up the path. Something in the woman's walk seemed to touch a chord in Zitella's memory. She looked again, and a low cry of terror broke from her lips, for the woman had suddenly lifted her head, and in the dark, bronzed visage Zitella imagined she recognised Zanon, her gipsy foster-mother.

"If it is her—if it should be!" gasped the girl, shrinking back in wild terror, but not before the vagrant had caught a glimpse of her. "And if so, what hope is there for me? What can have brought her here but to wreak vengeance on me. Oh, Heaven! perhaps Hermann—"

It was added terror which checked the flow of Zitella's thoughts, for Zanon had approached the window, and was holding out her shrivelled hand imploring a coin. Then their glances met, and Zitella began to breathe freely, and almost to smile at her folly as she saw she had been mistaken. No gleam of recognition was in the woman's wild, dark eyes. It was not Zanon! She was about to order the gipsy away sharply, when a sudden thought flashed through her mind, and, wild and improbable as it was, she determined to act upon it.

Beckoning the woman forward Zitella placed some coins in her out-stretched hand, and checked the voluble flow of thanksgiving by saying in tongue which she had not used for three years,—

"You are a gipsy; you come from Spain; do not be afraid to confide in me. I also am Spanish, and I love your people."

"Roumania was my birthplace," replied the woman sadly, but we know no dwelling place, and Spain has been as much my home as any other land. My son and I have been in England for the past year; how we came, or why, does not matter, but we have been here too long. I yearn to get back to my own land, that I may die there; but it is a wild, vain dream. Where should I find the money? You are the first who has shown me any mercy."

"I feel with you," replied Zitella in her gentlest tones. "We have kindred passions, but you must not despair of your desire. More wonderful things have happened. How much would you require to take you and your son back to your birthland?"

The vagrant named a sum, and Zitella replied eagerly,—

"You shall have this sum, twice as much, if you will name some spot near this in which we may meet to night and talk without fear of disturbance. I also have a heart's desire, in which you may help me without injury to yourself. I know," she added quickly, "that you have the art of divination, and I want you to reveal my future to me."

"I will not fail you, sweet lady," replied the gipsy; and then with muttered words that sounded like a blessing on her benefactor the gipsy turned away and passed down the garden path.

At that moment Valentine re-entered the room, and with a sweet, sad smile the girl beckoned him to her side. She drew his attention to the retreating form of the vagrant, and raised her dark eyes, suffused with tears, to his face.

"A link of my old life," she murmured. "That poor creature is a gipsy, my foster-mother. She came just now to the window asking alms; and though I knew her she did not appear to know me; but she looked at me with such a strange, guilty, fearful look. Perhaps I shall see her again."

Valentine heard little of what his companion was saying. He was absorbed in his own thoughts, thoughts of his love and the beauty

of the face into which he was gazing; but when Zitella paused he took her hand.

"My child, you sent me away in anger just now. You misunderstood me; and because I cannot bear to be estranged from you I have come back to say—"

"Ah! say nothing now," interrupted Zitella, feverishly.

She had withdrawn her hand from Valentine's, and veiled with it her excited face. "Say nothing," she repeated, with a sob. "I was all to blame. I would have tempted you to deceive your friends for my sake. I wonder, now, that I had so little pride. But you need fear no more; I will be Zitella the gipsy once more."

"You will be, Zitella, my love, as you have ever been—my world!"

And as he spoke Valentine endeavoured to encircle the slender form with a lover's tender arm, but resolutely Zitella drew herself away.

"Oh, no," she answered, with a convulsive sob. "You forget all that lies between you and me. Remember, I am but a gipsy."

"I remember it," cried Valentine, passionately, with pride and joy, "Zitella, my queen, my darling!"

"Oh, hush!" was the pleading interposition. "Say no more, at least, not now; wait until to-morrow. I feel as if I stood on the brink of a revelation. I feel as if to-morrow would make a great change in my life."

"Who do you think, Blanche, has been to see me while you were out riding?"

"Mr. Valentine Eyre?"

"Oh, you little witch! But, of course, you have had the news from Peters or Jeannette, my maid."

"I assure you, Lady Fitzroy, that I have not seen either Peters or Jeannette; but Captain Lister, whom I met in the Row this afternoon, told me that Mr. Eyre had returned, and I thought it likely that he would remember his old friend."

Lady Fitzroy smiled at her young friend's explanation, and then said, in a music tone—

"Valentine Eyre did remember me, but I cannot say that the object of his visit was entirely disinterested. He came to ask me a favour."

"Then he must be greatly changed from the Valentine of five years ago," replied Blanche Hastings, in a decided tone.

"He is greatly changed. The cynic is merged in the lover."

"You astonish me, Lady Fitzroy!"

"It is true, my dear Blanche. Our marble Valentine has fallen in love, and in a most romantic way, with a waif of his adoption, whom he now desires me to receive into my household, that she may be presented to society under the most favourable auspices."

"Who is this girl?" asked Blanche Hastings, with languid interest.

"You remember a child whom I brought from Spain three years ago?"

"I fancy I heard you speak of her at the time; the orphan of a Spanish nobleman?"

"So I thought; but that story was not true. Valentine found the child among some gipsies; and, attracted by her beauty, conceived the idea of sending her to England to be educated. Now, at the most critical time of the girl's life, her real name and birth is revealed. It seems," continued Lady Fitzroy, "that Zitella is the only child of an Austrian noble, Count Sofreska by name, and the last of her distinguished race."

"The Count, being suspected of some conspiracy against the government, his property was seized, and his life threatened, when, to avoid capture, he fled into exile, leaving his child, with money and jewels, in the care of a nurse whom he deemed faithful."

"The nurse loved her charge, but she had a gipsy lover, for whose sake she converted the count's jewels into money, and fled to Spain with the child, which she refused to abandon."

So Zitella grew up among the gipsies until she was found and rescued by Valentine Eyre."

"A most romantic story if only it were true," remarked Blanche Hastings; "but who is to prove its truth?"

"It has been already proved beyond a doubt," replied Lady Fitzroy, "for this gipsy Zanoia, is now in London, with proofs of Zitella's parentage; the other day she saw and recognised her foster-child, whom she afterwards identified in the presence of Valentine Eyre."

"This young girl is very beautiful?" asked Blanche, in a tone whose forced indifference could not mask the burning jealousy which prompted the question.

"If she has fulfilled the promise of her childhood she will be the most dazzling star that has ever risen on a London season. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth when it is announced that she is engaged to her guardian. I am only sorry," continued Lady Fitzroy, "that I did not see more of Miss Sofreska during past three years, but society has so many demands."

"And for the future this new beauty will have so many that I shall be nowhere in your esteem."

Lady Fitzroy looked up at her friend with a smile and a few words of remonstrance.

"My dear Blanche, if I did not know you a lovely woman and one conscious of your own loveliness, I should say that you were envious of Miss Sofreska."

"Two stars move not in one sphere," quoted Blanche, with a sneer; "but I suppose I have had my season, and must submit to be eclipsed," she added, lightly, as she gathered up her riding hat and gloves and swept from the room.

"How odd Blanche is sometimes," mused Lady Fitzroy, when she was left alone. "She is so beautiful that whatever new star arises she may always command her own court, and certainly envy or jealousy is a new phase of her character. I always thought her too cold for such an emotion."

While Blanche Hastings, as she passed up the tapestry hung stairs to her own apartments, murmured through set teeth—

"To think that five years a meaningless look, a light word, should have kindled a fire which to-day burns clearer than ever. Oh, Heaven! to think that I should have sighed in vain for a love which has been freely lavished on another—Zitella."

She broke off suddenly, catching her breath in a sob, as she reached her corridor, and encountered the astonished face of her maid, who had never seen her beautiful young mistress so agitated before.

(To be continued.)

## EDEN'S SACRIFICE.

—:O:—

### CHAPTER I.

SHE was behind the laburnum hedge. Her eyes had caught the gleam of the sunshine, her lips and cheeks were the shade of the sweetbrier that bloomed behind her.

She was peeping through the parted growth at a man on the other side, her features drawn into a smile that brought out every sweet, coquettish dimple in the lovely olive face, every gleam, from black to amber, in the dancing eyes.

Her wealth of hair was pushed back from a low, broad brow, but escaped her sun-hat in little, rebellious, clustering curls; her gown, open at the neck, exposed a firm, round throat, with the flash of health peeping through the olive skin.

Everybody admitted that Eden Carleton was lovely; the poor idolised her. But there were those who shook their heads sadly when her name was mentioned.

Old Mrs. Griffiths expressed the opinion of

the neighbourhood when she said to her daughter,—

"Yes, I grant you Eden is beautiful, generous, and high of soul, but she is too much indulged, too capricious, too wilful. She invariably acts first, and thinks afterwards. Her impulsiveness is going to lead her into an act of folly some day that will ruin her life."

If Mrs. Griffiths' words were to prove prophetic, there could never be anything more sad, for Helen of Troy was not more beautiful, nor Cleopatra more alluring than this girl, while an odour of such childlike innocence and faith played about her that the very atmosphere she breathed seemed cleansed of impurities.

She stood as we first see her, gazing upon a man who was approaching—a man as worthy of description as herself.

He wore a suit of immaculately white flannel, and carried himself with an indolent, high-bred elegance that was intensely attractive, his six feet of height worn with the grace of a gentleman athlete.

His eyes were of a dreamy brown, with a flash of fire that showed him to be possessed of a temper, governable only from long experience.

A long, silken moustache swept a month of peculiar beauty and firmness, while the poise of a noble head was perhaps the most artistic effect in the person of Bartram—shortened to Bertie.

Eden shrank back as he reached the gate in the hedge, fondly believing that she was out of the range of his vision, but he passed through the gate, and joined her with the utmost sang froid.

"You will be as dark of complexion as Margaret if you stand in that sun much longer, Eden," he said, coolly.

"Who gave you permission to call me Eden, Mr. Staunton?" she asked, sardonically. "One would think I had known you at least three weeks."

"Instead of exactly ten days," he said, with a brief but musical laugh. "Ah, well! I'm going away to-morrow, and you'll let me be happy for this one day, will you not?"

"To-morrow?"

She forgot his question in wondering what she would do with her life after that eventful to-morrow.

The smile faded from her mouth, and a little pathetic quiver touched her lips, but Bertie Staunton, though he saw, was by no means content.

It was the child's grief for the loss of a toy, not the woman's sorrow at a parting from love.

"Yes, to-morrow," he repeated. "Come out of this heat, under the shelter of the oak over there, and let me tell you about it."

She followed him obediently, all the exquisite dimples gone; but, before the shade had been reached, her insouciance had returned.

She threw herself down among the daisies and buttercups, flung her hat aside, and raised her eyes to his face, not tearfully, but with a certain daring.

"I shall miss you, Sir Knight!" she exclaimed. "Why did you not tell me that you were going before?"

"I didn't know it myself," he answered, stretching his long, graceful legs across the grass indolently, as he half reclined at her side. "It was one of those beastly telegrams that always interrupt a fellow in the midst of his vacation. Shall you be sorry to have me go, Eden?"

"Oh, yes, of course! You are much more agreeable than Joe Brown, or even Don."

"The compliment is not portentous when one considers that Joe Brown is a half-idiotic ploughboy, and Don a half-bred cur. Eden, how old are you?"

"Seventeen, Mr. Impertinence."

"And such a child! I never knew a girl so young for her years. I wonder if you would know what I mean if I told you that I love you?"

"Do you think everybody in this neighbourhood has the same affliction as Joe Brown? Don't imagine, pray, that I have passed my life without love. Every one loves me. Mr. Fenton and—"

"Mr. Fenton is the parson."

"And Malcolm!"

"Malcolm is your brother."

"What of that? He can love me just the same, can't he?"

"Not as I do," answered Staunton, raising his eyes to hers with that passionate fire that every woman understands instinctively. "There is just the same difference between the love your brother gives you and that I give as there is between moonlight and the glow of that hot sun! I adore you! Nothing can suggest words for its expression! It is the love that makes life without its object a misery, and death the presence of a god! Eden, could you ever care for me?"

She laughed nervously; and, breaking a daisy from the stem, held it up.

"This shall tell you," she said, lightly, beginning to pull away the petals. "*Elle m'aime*—"

"Don't!" he interrupted, taking the maimed flower forcibly from her hand. "It feels as though you were playing with the nerves of my heart. Answer me, Eden, do you love me?"

His earnestness drove out her lightness, as a cloud obscures the sun.

She frowned slightly, and looked away from him, then replied,—

"I don't know. I like your voice, and the touch of your hand. I am proud of your magnificent manhood. I like to watch you. You see, I am not such a child as you believed. I like to feel my power over you, for you do love me, Bertie!"

It was the first time she had ever called him that, and a flash of colour swept over his face, leaving him paler than before.

He drew himself a little nearer her, and, turning in his reclining position, put both arms about her waist, unrepulsed.

"I never expected so much," he said, allowing his passion expression in eyes and voice as he had never done before. "You do love me. I can read it in every wave of colour in your cheeks, I can feel it in every thrilling fibre of your being. My darling!"

She held him from her, both small, pink palms upon his breast, and smiled, but there was something delicious in it more encouraging than her words.

"I am not quite sure," she said. "I confess that you fascinate, you magnetise me, but is that love?"

"It will be in time. Eden, I am to return to London to-morrow. Come with me as my wife."

"Are you mad?" she cried, almost indignantly. "Ten days ago you were an absolute stranger to me. I met you in the woods and liked you because you were trying to set a rabbit's broken leg instead of killing it as most men would have done. That rabbit was my introduction to you, but you had not an acquaintance in the entire community. My brother is away. He will undoubtedly disapprove of my friendship with you. What would he say were I to do this outrageous thing as you suggest?"

"He would be angry at first and forgive you later. Because he is your only surviving relative does not make you belong to him. Do you think your disapproval would make him decline to marry a woman?"

"I am quite sure of it. Malcolm and I are all alone in the world, and we love each other as no brother and sister ever did before. He would never marry unless I consented—never! Why, it would break my heart if he married a woman I did not know. No! If you love me you must wait or come again, Bertie, when Malcolm is here. You must tell him who you are, for we are very proud, Malcolm and I, and our family dates back to the time when Egbert the Saxon was made first sovereign of all England in 827 A.D. Our ancestors have

all married their equals in point of birth, and Malcolm says we must never disgrace their example. There has never been one of them who could compare with you, Bertie, in personality; but you must have Malcolm's consent before I can become your wife, as he must have mine before he can take a wife."

Bertie had dropped his head and was pulling negligently at the grass that grew in such luxuriance about him. His face was flushed, his hand unsteady, his eyes downcast.

Eden laid her hand upon his black hair lightly.

"Have I offended you, Bertie?" she asked, gently. "I have not a doubt but that your birth is as good or better than my own. Your breeding I know to be perfect, and your manner such only as a gentleman could possess."

He raised his head, his lips twitching slightly.

"I would give my soul to win you, Eden," he said, passionately, "to make you love me in the same masterful way that I love you."

Her lips trembled at his earnestness, and she was about to reply with some degree of warmth, when she saw Margaret, her maid, approaching. They moved further apart and waited.

"It's a telegram, Miss Eden," the maid said, delivering it and departing.

Eden tore open the envelope and threw it carelessly on the ground beside her, then unfolded the yellow paper.

She read it aloud:

"To Miss Eden Carleton, Oak Vale."

"I was married this morning. Forgive me, and expect letter announcing date of our return to-morrow."

"MALCOLM."

White and cold the unhappy girl sat holding the luckless paper in her hand, her heart rigid with bitterness.

Understanding it, Staunton's arm went about her; his hand passed with tenderness over her still, set face.

"You must not grieve so, my darling!" he murmured, gently. "You don't know why he has done it yet."

The words aroused her, and pushing him from her, she struggled to her feet.

"He has broken faith with me—the faith of my whole life—and he tells me of it in that heartless way through a telegram!" she cried, in a quivering voice. "He has broken my heart. Bertie, you said you were going to London to-morrow, and asked me to go with you. I called you mad then, but now I ask your pardon. I will go with you as your wife, if you will have me."

He remembered her impulsive nature. He knew that she spoke from a bristled heart; and he recollected other things—things in his own life that he knew must come to her knowledge sooner or later.

All that was best and noblest in him pleaded for a refusal of her offer; but with those sweet, grieved eyes upon him, loving her with all the passion of a mad heart, he would have been more than human had he not yielded to the cry of nature.

He put out his arms and drew her to him in inextinguishable ecstasy.

## CHAPTER II.

Eden was like one of Rembrandt's or Gainsborough's old masterpieces in her grey travelling dress and broad hat to match, with its drooping feathers. A broad belt of chased silver drew the artistic gown in at the slender waist, and a single pearl held it at the throat.

She was drawing on her long grey gloves as Staunton entered. His eyes flashed over her, taking in every asymmetrical line of her perfect form, every curve in her lovely face.

She lifted her great eyes, in which there was no welcome, only passionate anger.

He had meant to tell her the truth—to

make her acquainted with the facts of his life, and then entreat her to be his wife in face of all; but her first words routed his courage.

"At least you have not failed me, Bertie," she said. "See how I have trusted you, in that I am ready to follow where you lead?"

"You do trust me then, sweetheart?" he asked, placing his arm about her and bending his handsome head to kiss her.

"You are all that is left me!"

"And you love me?"

She drew away, not impatiently.

"That will come by-and-by. My heart is too sore now to think of love. There is but one thing—if you ever deceive me I shall despise you! There," as he was about to speak, "don't promise. Another did, and he broke his word. Oh, Bertie, I trusted and loved him so!"

The sweet voice quivered and broke. A mist of tears gathered before the dark eyes, but were angrily dashed aside.

"The trap is at the door, is it not?" she asked, haughtily. "The train will be due by the time we reach the station."

He bowed silently and offered his arm.

Margaret was ascending to her room when Eden reached the hall.

"I will not be at home to-night nor to-morrow, Margaret," she said. "Have the east wing put in thorough order for your master and his wife."

"His—"

"His wife!" I said, interrupted Eden, coldly. "I don't know exactly what day they will arrive, but you are to expect them at any time. Tell Mrs. Wilson, please. And, Margaret, you may pack my boxes, and have them ready when I send."

"But, Miss Eden—"

"That is all. Good-bye!"

It was not Eden's nature to be cold and unkind. On the contrary, she was warm-hearted and impulsive. But her brother's act had frozen her.

She felt that he had wronged her. She had worshipped him, and he had made a solemn pledge to each other never to marry without the other's consent.

She had never broken her word in her life; never deceived any one by even so much as a look, and that he should do so was a terrible grief to her—not a grief that agonised, but one that angered—that makes one long for some revenge.

She followed Staunton to the dog-cart, forgetting to observe, as she had always done before, how graceful he was, and how perfectly his tweed travelling suit fitted his lithe form.

He handed her into the dog-cart, took the ribbons, and drove silently to the station.

In five minutes afterwards they were on their way to London.

Staunton was preoccupied, not himself, though he was the personification of courtesy to his companion, while she sat nursing her anger against her brother.

The truth that "two wrongs cannot make a right" never occurred to her; nor the fact that she was marrying Staunton because she was displeased with her brother.

Pride was the fault of her race, and that was her inheritance.

It was late at night when they arrived in London; but, in spite of the hour, Staunton gave the coachman an order which took them to a clergyman of his acquaintance.

The carriage door closed upon them, and Eden leaned wearily back upon the cushions.

In the dim light Staunton watched the pale face a moment in silence; then he took her hand reverently.

"Eden," he said, tenderly. "are you quite sure you do not regret? Remember, dear, this is not for a week nor a month, but for ever. Do you think you will ever love me? I don't wish to fret you now with unnecessary conversation, but your whole future happiness depends upon this."

(Continued on page 92.)

## THE EYES OF THE PICTURE.

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## CHAPTER XXII.—(continued.)

At a signal, an attendant brought fresh cards.

"Another bottle of wine, Williams!" began Venner, when Erls court interposed.

"No, Venner; allow me," and gave the order to the servant, who presently brought the wine and glasses.

"Do you know," said Venner, filling his glass, "that you've ordered the best wine in the place, and King keeps some prime stuff? What an extravagant dog you are!"

"What's the good of money if you don't spend it?" said the other, beginning to deal.

"I can't imagine where you get such a lot. Is it true that you've sold most of those pictures?"

"Most of them. Why shouldn't I enjoy life while I can? When there is nothing more to spend is time enough to put on sackcloth. At present we only want one thing more to make perfection."

"Women," said Venner, bursting into a roar of laughter, "wine, women, and dice, or cards, which is it? But, deuce take me, Erls court, what a sly one you are!"

Erls court laughed, and shrugged his shoulders.

"One can't take all the world into one's confidence," he said, "but you—"

"I'm one of the same sort, eh? Right you are; no sanctimonious squeamishness about me. You've found that out. I am not obliged to play the hypocrite. I am not obliged to keep up a good reputation. I've had some fine games in my time."

"Well, let's hear some of them," said Erls court, pushing the wine towards him.

"I always did say to George," said Venner, slipping out the more familiar name, then pulling himself up; seeing which, Erls court said, in a puzzled way,—

"George!"

"I was going to say George King. Well, I was saying I always said to him that I didn't believe but what you were as wild as the rest of us, only you kept more dark."

"Wiser, eh?" said Erls court, with a significant look. "Your glass is empty, don't spare the wine. Now then for your story. It isn't fair to raise hopes you don't satisfy."

"But I say, Erls court," said Venner, with the stupid persistency of a man not quite sober, and this last bottle of wine was certainly strong, "why the deuce were you so dark?"

"Didn't I tell you I was wise? I don't mind trusting you, now, but I haven't known you so very long."

"Oh, I see."

Then he launched into the sort of story which men such as he delight in, but which Erls court had always refused to listen to in his earliest manhood.

He could have killed the wretched profligate who sat there boasting in coarse language of his prowess; yet he only smiled with a slightly superior air.

"Pooh, that's common-place enough!" he said. "Your deal, Venner."

"Oh, is it common-place, indeed!" retorted Venner, piqued. "Just you listen. My deal, is it?"

"Yes," said Erls court, on fire with impatience, but still maintaining the incredulous smile on his lips that he knew would have an effect on Venner's vanity.

Venner dealt the cards with the uncertain deliberation that belongs to his stage of inebriety.

Erls court gave a quick glance round; their table was set apart, so that they were almost alone; the rest of the men were intent on their own games, discussing the racing news, or making bets. George King he knew was out.

"Common-place, indeed!" half growled Venner, still handling the cards; the accusa-

tion evidently rankled a great deal more than if Erls court had called him a scoundrel. "I'll tell you something that isn't common-place at all."

"You're such a deuce of a time telling it," said Erls court, dryly, leaning back.

"Not at all. It was just this way," said Venner, eagerly, and going on with the game.

"She was awfully pretty, a little school-girl down in the country, a lady, you understand, and not the ordinary sort. Upon my honour I had a sort of fancy for her."

He chuckled to himself, filling up another glass of wine.

Erls court had turned white as death; he could only grope blindly, as it were, after the one thought that could save him from self-betrayal. He had almost sworn he felt the magic touch, heard the pleading voice—"For my sake!"

No one seeing him would have noticed anything but that he sat considering his cards—intent, as a careful player should be. He knew that he felt as if a look, a word of his, would have shattered his self-control.

"A school-girl," he repeated, lifting his head, and with all his efforts his voice sounded changed to his own ear. "For shame, Venner; you might let such pieces of innocence alone!"

He might seem shocked without fear. It was not his *role* to pose as a profligate, that would have been to go too far to deceive Venner; but the very sense that he was rather shocked stimulated Venner's self-satisfaction in the blackest sin of his life.

"But such a charming one!" said he. "I was vegetating down there"—he had a curious amount of caution through all—"in fact, if you want to know, hiding from my creditors; and what's a fellow to do in a dull hole like that but to make love to the prettiest girl he can find?"

"There's something in that argument—stolen meetings, rambles by moonlight in leafy lanes, forbidden letters—"

The man stopped, half-choked with the burning thoughts his own words called up.

The next instant he laughed lightly. "Yes; there's nothing else to do, of course. I can find some excuse. And a fellow gets led on."

"Exactly. You understand the thing *au fond*," said Venner, delightedly. "You're a rare good *camarade*. But the worst of it is, a girl like that won't be made a toy, and cast off when one is tired of it."

"I suppose she would have some objections to it. Some men wouldn't have much hesitation in getting over that."

Again he checked himself before he had lost his self-mastery; again his heart went out to the lonely woman who had no other hope or faith in life but himself. He added,—

"But it wants deception in some way—either a promise of marriage, or—I was going to say—a false marriage, but that's too risky. It might be possible"—he leant back again, seeming to glance over the room, but letting his eyes drop on Venner every now and then—"to so manage that she believed a real marriage illegal—void—"

"What the devil are you talking about?" exclaimed Venner, savagely, and his hand went to the breast-pocket of his coat. "Who said I married her? I didn't. I wasn't such a fool!"

"Heaven! give me patience!" was the cry in the other's heart. "There is no other help!"

For his strength was snapping, and even his darling's voiceless prayer was hushed, almost silenced, in the storm within him.

"Of course not," he said. "I was imagining a case. You must have been irresistible, Venner, in your giddy youth—for I suppose this happened some years ago?"

"Some years—yes. No, I didn't marry her," repeated Venner, doggedly, again putting his hand in his coat-pocket, unwitting of the watchful eyes opposite him. "Curse her!

How she looked at me!—like that picture!"

"What picture!"

"Oh! never mind," answered Venner, hastily. "Your play!"

They played in silence for a little while—Erls court blindly, and Venner taking every allowable and unallowable advantage—as he had done many a time.

Then the painter said,—

"Did you ever hear what became of her? I suppose she went back to her home."

"Married again, I daresay," said Venner, with a short laugh, not noticing the slip of expression—and it suited Erls court not to notice him. All he said was,—

"You're not touching the wine, Venner. Let me pour you out another glass. Perhaps you're tired of that? I'll order up some other. What will you like?"

"No, thanks; this is first-rate!" answered Venner, tossing off the best part of the glassful.

So far Erls court was forced to give up the idea under which he had suggested the change of wine.

He had little fear that the refusal was in consequence of suspicion of himself—there was not the slightest ground for that. It was rather the habitual caution asserting itself, even through confusion of the senses—the same caution that had kept him from ever once mentioning the place where he had wooed the pretty schoolgirl.

"You haven't vindicated your assertion," Erls court said, presently. "It's not so very uncommon—the same sort of thing happens often enough."

"Oh! does it then," said Venner, mysteriously. "I say, Erls court, you'll keep dark; these sort of things—stupid mistakes in one's youth, you know."

"I understand. I shall say nothing, of course. After all, what's the great harm done? I don't believe in such innocence. I always did think girls in such cases have a pretty shrewd idea what they are doing. I am not such a great believer in women—they are confoundingly artful."

"What a sensible fellow you are!" said Venner, with admiration. "I fancied once you were rather of the romantic sort."

"Well, I'm not then—except in pictures," said Erls court. "I say, Venner, you're beating me; you'll be the ruin of me some day."

"You play so carelessly," said Venner, with an exaggerated politeness, which anyone else save Erls court would have thought ludicrous. But he was not in the state to notice it—certainly not in this man.

"You're such a good player, that's how it is," said Erls court. "I shall have to give up playing with you, Venner."

"What! when we're such good friends? Oh, you mustn't do that," said Venner, sentimentally. "We'll have some fun together some of these nights; don't desert me."

Erls court forced himself not to yield to the sickening repulsion that came over him. He had proved his point—which he had thought it just as well to prove—that Venner was not in any way out of humour with him. He let the game go on to the end, won a little, lost again, and finally rose in Venner's debt.

"Sorry I can't pay up to-night," he said. "I shan't be able to be down here for a few nights, and, besides, I'm afraid I'm rather cleared out."

"Never mind," said Venner, cordially, "quite at your convenience. Are you going? It's early."

"Past three—yes, I'm going. I have to work all day, Venner. You are a gentleman at large. Good-night!"

He had to shake hands with him; his manner was perfect as usual. He said good-night to those he knew, smiling his bright smile.

Just as the porter closed the door behind him, and he stood for a second in the street—almost quiet at this time—a man passed slowly, looking up at the windows, a man whose figure and face Erls court knew he had

seen somewhere, the more so as a look of recognition came into this person's eyes, though he made no sign otherwise, but walked on indifferently.

"I have it," said Erlscourt. "It's the man I've seen talking to Lucie at Violet's door—the detective—what's his name—Hilliard. I think I see it."

He stood there waiting till the man had gone well out of sight of the club, then followed him, coming up with him at the corner of a side street. The man, hearing the step, turned, and as the painter joined him touched his hat respectfully.

"Do you want me, sir?" he said.

Of course he knew from Lucie all about Erlscourt and his relations with Violet—as far as she knew them.

"Yes, I do, but I don't want anyone else to know it," said Erlscourt, glancing back.

They turned out of the street.

"You're watching King's," began the painter, abruptly.

"Well, sir—"

"Oh, I don't want you to affirm or deny it. I am quite sure of it."

"I can't say more, sir," said Hilliard, "than that I hope you'll keep clear of it. I shouldn't like to hear of your getting into any trouble."

"Thanks. I am quite sure of that. But I am going to ask you to do something for me which is equally against rules. Of course this watching will end in a raid. I have my own reasons for wanting to know about the time when that will take place."

"Mr. Erlscourt, I'm sure you wouldn't want to shield any of those people," said Hilliard; "but still, sir, I don't like to refuse you, but I really daren't."

"I want to shield them!" said Erlscourt. "I give you my honour I would not lift a finger to help one of them. Nothing you say to me shall pass my lips. I want to know for an entirely private reason, which will not in the least interfere with the law."

"Well, sir, I know you'll keep your word, and I'll do what I can; but if the heads get hold of it—"

"They never will. Well, don't tell me the actual night, but what are the nights!" said Erlscourt, with an involuntary smile that went quickly.

"I'll do what I can, sir," repeated the man, amused. "It won't be immediately. One of our fellows was in the other night, but we want a bit more evidence yet."

"I won't forget your service, Hilliard," said Erlscourt, warmly, knowing the man too well to offer him money. "Good-night."

"Good-night, sir," said Hilliard, and stood looking after the tall figure stepping so lightly down the street.

"Sorry to see him in that crib. What can he go for? Well, I shan't tell my girl of this. It's between him and me, and, besides, she'd be telling Mrs. Herbert, and that would be the last thing he'd want."

## CHAPTER XXIII.

THE rapid drive home from King's Club had not been enough to lull into the semblance of calmness the tempest in Erlscourt's heart. He had no room just now to think of himself—of his own loss. Venner's brutal indifference to the wreck of a woman's honour, his coarse remarks, his utter heartlessness, had roused too many and fierce passions to be calmed down for many an hour.

And then there was his own triumph, not taken from in the least by any compunction as to the means he had employed. He had gained enough to act on further. Venner's sudden anger when the suggestion of deception had been made, his repeated denial that he had married the girl, his persistence that the story he had told was out of the common, pointed to a marriage. Above all, Erlscourt felt convinced that he had lighted on the hiding-place of whatever documentary evidence there might be—probably the certificate.

It was broad daylight when he entered his house, so quietly as to disturb no one, and went up to his studio. There was no need for immediate action, yet it was impossible for him to sit still, or attend to anything else.

An antique-looking carved Italian cabinet stood in a corner of the room, and a drawer of this he unlocked, turning out half a dozen things before he came to what he wanted—a very small revolver.

He examined it carefully—it wanted nothing but cleaning. This he set to work to do, fetching what he wanted noiselessly. We all know what it is to be so possessed by one subject as to feel it impossible to be drawn away from it—to be glad to do anything that is connected with it.

So Erlscourt felt this early summer morning. He did not yet feel the reaction of the strain—he was still too strung up for that. He did not either in any definite way think of Violet; of his own part in the future nothing at all.

What was in his mind was every incident of the past night, every word and look—a grim satisfaction in preparing his weapon, and a steady laying of his plans. And all the while his face hardly changed—the brows slightly contracted, the lips never parting, and seemingly bloodless, the clear cheek still white, the dark eyes burning. The almost uncontrollable passions of the earlier hours had not cooled—only settled down into that deadly concentration, that ruthless purpose that, when the time comes, blazes out the more for its suppression.

He had no want or wish but to crush the man who had wronged Violet, and dared to boast of it; he did not even want to see Violet—he wanted nothing soft or tender near him—he would have gone from it, not sought it. This mood lasted till the Sunday, then he began to feel the need that the fever within him should be allayed.

So it was that, after luncheon, Violet saw him come into her drawing-room. He had made up his mind he could not go to his sister's that afternoon as promised—he could not bear it; but when he had told Violet what had passed, and they had talked it over, he felt it more in the nature of things to come back to life's daily duties.

There was magic in her mere presence, and she had been so quiet—not elated, not upset by this new hope; so that even he was half deceived into thinking that she was more doubtful than need be. What man is ever at all points quite clear about a woman? He never knew till afterwards how she had really taken his news, how that faint hope had been an agony to her in a way that none but a woman could altogether comprehend.

But, meanwhile, she had strengthened him by that soothing power of calmness, so that when she told him she thought he had better keep his engagement, he acquiesced without a word. On another point, though, he resisted even her power—he would not tell her what he intended doing.

"Very well," said Violet, seeing he would not yield, "but remember that any publicity will only injure me. I do not say you, because you will not listen to that; still, you must see that injury to you is also injury to me in every way."

"Am I likely to forget it, Violet?" he asked, almost reproachfully.

"Perhaps not; but there are points beyond which one would hardly wish a man to remember any considerations without the incentive I am trying to give you. I am not sure how far you can be trusted with a weapon in your hand. If you promise—"

"A thousand times!" he began, impetuously. "Nay, once is enough. You will remember that it is given to me. Now, go and see your sister; don't let there be any miserable breach because of me," and her lip quivered.

Perhaps for once in her life she was glad to have him go—to be alone, to have no need of pretence—to be herself.

It was a curious change from this tragedy of hopes and fears to the even cheerfulness of the Challoner household. There was no one else present but himself and Greville. Mrs. Challoner had been brought up in the Erlscourt tenets of very High Churchism, but she had not been able to withstand the bent of her precise formal nature, which inclined her to some curious touches of Puritanism. Dora had once saucily said Cousin Emily was a Puritan got astray. Certainly Emily never would consent to seeing any but the members of her immediate family on Sunday—except lonely bachelors, like young Greville, who might otherwise mispend the day.

Erlscourt flung off any depression by force of will, and even keen-sighted Dora thought she had been mistaken in thinking, when he first came in, that he did not look himself. Emily was more affectionate than ever towards him, and very delighted to have him back again.

There was certainly a struggle between heart and conscience when, after tea, she asked if Dora was going to church, and who was going with her.

"I don't want to drag any one out," said Dora.

They were in the garden, Erlscourt lying at his sister's feet, with his curly head propped on his hand while he read. He announced, without looking up, that Dora would have to do without his escort.

"That's very rude!" laughed Emily. "I am sure you haven't been to church to-day."

"That is a libel, Emmie, I have. Greville and I always go together, don't we, Grev? We're not reprobates. I don't feel good enough to go to-night. I daresay Grev. does, so he can go."

Having settled which, he relapsed into his book. Emily was the more pleased that she felt she had done her duty in urging him.

Dora rose with a hesitating glance at Greville, which he answered by a glance not at all hesitating; therewith the young lady felt, with a little flutter of her heart, that she was not making a martyr of him, and went to put on her hat.

Perhaps if Emily had at all penetrated the wickedness there may be in the heart of a young man in love she had not felt so satisfied that Greville was going in the way he should go. Once outside the door, and walking down by the canal westwards, he remarked casually,—

"It's a superb evening—it's a sin to be shut up."

"Then you are not good after all," said Dora. "You mustn't suggest not going to church."

"That's just what I want to suggest. I am sure you don't think it wicked."

"Oh no."

She walked on, not quite easy in her mind, a little afraid of him.

"Come into the park," said Greville, with a sort of bold insinuation.

Dora laughed.

"I can't. What will Emily say?"

"What will you say?" he answered, looking into her eyes; and perhaps because the question seemed to be given a double meaning by that look of his the girl blushed.

It is said that when we are tempted there is always something to help us on further. The assistance in this case appeared in the form of the familiar and useful hansom, which Greville signalled without more ado, and put Dora in, telling the man to put them down at Gloucester-gate.

The drive was performed in silence, which was not broken till they got into the Gardens, at this hour full of people of the working classes, and many a pair of sweethearts, at whom Dora forbore to laugh as usual. She thought instead, compassionately,—

"Why shouldn't the poor things be happy?"

She chatted away on anything that came into her head, with many a qualm as to what Emily would say to her walking in.

Kensington Gardens with Morton Greville on Sunday evening.

There used to be a leafy dell down by the Round Pond that was almost a solitude—that, alas! has been done away with by some soulless mortal; but lovers, being non-gregarious animals, will manage still to find in the old Gardens some nooks less frequented than other parts.

It was in some such quiet spot that Greville suddenly broke across the stream of Dora's made talk with the question,—

"Dora, we are not to be such strangers again, are we?"

Dora did not rebuke the unwonted familiarity. The word had slipped his lips once before. She only answered, "she didn't know—she hoped not."

"Sit down here," said Greville, as they came to two chairs set invitingly under a great spreading tree.

Dora obeyed, remarking innocently that it was nice and cool, making no objection when Greville possessed himself of one of the daintily-gloved hands lying in her lap except an instinctive movement as if to withdraw it, which had no effect but for him to make it a closer prisoner.

"Dora—darling!" he said, earnestly, "it rests with you. You must know—you do know—how I love you. If you will only let me keep this hand in mine—promise it—no one, nothing shall keep me away."

She made the sweetest picture of happy confusion, with the colour flitting across her cheek, and her eyes, half-drooping, half shyly lifted.

There was enough in those eyes, brief as was the glimpse he caught of them, to make Greville stoop and cover the little hand with kisses.

This was certainly better than going to church, among hundreds of other people. It might be wiser to think so, but, nevertheless, these two would have thought it, if they had not been too happy for any question of right and wrong to enter their young heads.

They had no idea of anything but themselves. They heard but as a sort of accompaniment to the song in their own hearts, the evening song of the birds in the trees around them.

They wandered, not in Kensington Gardens, but in some fairy glades, where no one walks but lovers.

Not even Emily disturbed them till it occurred to Dora that they must go home.

"And what shall I say to Emily?" she said, in dismay.

"Don't say anything—leave it to me."

When they got back, they found the table in the dining-room laid ready for supper, the lamps alight both there and in the drawing-room, but no one about.

They were still in the garden, just as the trunks had left them, their forms faintly visible in the deepening darkness—Arthur and his wife talking softly, Leigh apparently only listening.

Dora went down the steps, and crossed to the group, Greville following her. Erlscourt lifted his head as they came up.

"What an awful long sermon you must have had!" said he wickedly.

"Taken a stroll after church?" said Challenger, innocently, while Dora cast an appealing glance at Greville.

"Who preached, Dora?" asked Emily, before he could speak.

"We haven't the least idea in the world," said Greville. "We went into the Park instead."

"I hope you won't mind, Emily," said Dora, nervously. "It was so lovely, and—"

"It was my fault," said Greville, trying to be very penitent.

"It was a very fine evening, certainly," said Emily, as amiably as she could, for though she was not best pleased, she was kind-hearted, and, besides, she could not tell a guest she thought him a delusion and a snare. "I am afraid, Mr. Greville, Leigh guaranteed too much for you!"

"You know, Mrs. Challenger," said the young man, "there is more than one shrine to worship at."

"Ah, well," said she, smiling, "run and take your hat off, Dora, my love, and we'll have supper."

Dora danced away. Erlscourt stretched out his hand to his friend, and Greville grasped it and held it for some seconds. It was too dark to see faces, else he alone would have read all that was in Erlscourt's.

Somehow, when they met at supper, they all seemed to understand each other. Emily had directly followed Dora, and probably Greville had said something to Challenger, for the latter kissed his young cousin when she came into the dining-room, and Leigh did more teasing than eating.

Emily looked beaming—probably too much of the woman to resist the influence of a love affair. Yet neither Greville nor Dora were selfish enough not to have each one saddening thought.

The contrast between himself and them must strike Erlscourt, and Dora involuntarily gave expression to that thought when Leigh was saying good-night to her, speaking earnestly, and asking her to forgive all his nonsense. She said she liked it.

"I should think you had quarrelled with me if you didn't chaff me! Besides, I wouldn't mind anything to-night."

"Too happy?" he said, almost wistfully, looking down into the bright young face.

"I wish you were as happy," came suddenly from the depths of her warm little heart.

His face shadowed.

"Don't think of me, dear," he said, gently, "though you wouldn't be Dora if you didn't. Another kiss for the thought, in spite of Greville."

"Greville hasn't the slightest objection," said the owner of that name. And he need not have, for his good-night was sufficiently prolonged to tax Erlscourt's patience, waiting discreetly on the pavement outside. Perhaps sympathy made him merciful, for he forbore to utter a single complaint as they went home.

#### CHAPTER XXIV.

"Is that you, Venner?" said George King, looking up from a dirty account-book as Venner came into his room upstairs one morning.

"Myself and none other," answered Venner, lounging to the table. "What the fiend are you after, George—cooking accounts?"

"I ain't cooking them, but they're jolly well done anyhow!" rejoined George, with a guffaw at his own joke. "We've been doing very well, Venner."

"Glad to hear it. The place is always full—poor fools."

"Yes," said King, in a lower voice, "and that's just the reason I think it time to pull in our horns!"

"Go to the devil for a born idiot!" said Venner, contemptuously.

"You may sneer if you like, but I'm right and you're wrong," said King. "You're like the big speculators that go on and on till they get ruined, when, if they'd pulled up in reason, they'd have been flourishing. There's often just such a point, I've noticed, where people can stop, and ought to stop. When they don't they generally go to the bad."

"Pooh!" said Venner. "You're showing the white feather because you fancy a few tees have been round."

"It ain't fancy. You know we had a warning, Venner."

"It wasn't a warning—you were frightened of one, and got hold of the policeman. Much you got out of him."

"It's very fine for you to be reckless," said George, rather warmly. "You think no one knows but what you're just a member—and perhaps they don't. Most of the brunt would come on me."

"Don't be so chicken-hearted—go on and

win," said Venner. He was less shrewd than his confederate, and he had more spirit—two things which made him less able to scent danger, and more careless. "I've got some fine birds in my hand. There's Wilson and Erlscourt. He never wins—at least not much. But we're the best of friends."

"Shows how much his friends are deceived in him, then," said George, "or he wouldn't be your friend—nor mine either; for he's not proud at all, though he is the born gentleman."

"Which means to say I'm not," said Venner, laughing. "Well, I don't pretend to the good blood he has, but my people were gentle enough," and for an instant a shade came over his face—a softening shade. One could just imagine what he might have looked like when he wandered years ago in those country lanes with Violet Herbert. It passed quickly—the vague feeling that caused it could not hold place long in a heart deadened to all gentler thoughts. "But to return to what we were saying. Get that notion out of your head, George. Go on and prosper—and we'll retire with big fortunes."

"Better retire with little ones," responded Mr. King, "while we've got them."

"Who cares a fig for little fortunes? I'd rather risk everything in a blow for the big one. You go on quietly, and see if we don't hoodwink the tecs. They want a good lot of evidence to break in."

"No, they don't. Who was that new man in last night?"

Venner burst out into a roar of laughter.

"So that's what frightening you is, old man? Why that fellow—if you mean the one with light grey clothes, and a dark beard and moustache—that was a friend of Tom Danby's; met him a month ago. Tom brought him here. He's all right. He's been here before. What a joke to think that swell-looking customer a tec!"

"Well, I'll let the matter drop for a bit," said George, "but take care."

Venner laughed again and left the room. Perhaps his eyes, as well as the eyes of most of the frequenters of King's, had lost their nice discrimination—those of them who ever had it—as to the gradations of swindlom. Anyhow, this is what, that very day, Detective Walter Hilliard wrote, in a disguised hand, in his lodging;—

"Our man was in again last night. He thinks G. V. is a proprietor along with the other. I think the date is the beginning of next week, but I'm not sure. I can't get exact information. Please burn this."

Erlscourt read this that evening, it having arrived by the last post. He read it twice, standing motionless in the middle of the room.

"Next week," he said. "I'll not forget this service, Hilliard," throwing the letter down on the hearth, lighting a match, and watching the paper burn till only the black shreds were left. Not all the chemistry in the world could have restored the faintest outline of a word. "This is a desperate venture of mine—it rests on too many chances. I wish I could manage it differently."

He stood watching the shreds at his feet curl away from each other and shrivel up. The task he had set himself was drawing to a close—a few days must, perforce, see the end of it, himself victor or Edgar Maraden.

He knew what he meant to do—he did not know what the result would be, or even whether trivial circumstances would not baffle him altogether.

It had come, after all, to brute force, as he had known it must, very early in his acquaintance with Venner.

All the latter had ever said in his most unguarded moments was not enough to commit him. Even when overcome with wine he had been cautious.

Erlscourt debated within himself whether he should want Greville. If he could do without him it were better, both for Greville's

own sake and to further avoid every chance of esclandre. He decided he could do without him.

The next idea that came into his mind after that point was settled he could not quite account for at the time. Afterwards, he put it down to the sort of prophetic intuition that sometimes comes during a crisis, when the mind is in a highly-wrought state. Yet the idea was commonplace enough—simply, that he should order a room at the Hotel for a week.

He went out, and himself sent a telegram to the proprietor to that effect, and, when the reply came, sat down and wrote to Walter Hilliard, without date, address or name, that he had taken this room, and could be heard of at the hotel, or any message left.

He had still his debt to pay to Venner; he had neither been to his chambers nor to the club since the debt was incurred. Hilliard's intimations, which he had been waiting for, determined him to release himself from his obligation—which had galled him, notwithstanding his deliberation in letting it run—and—if he could—pay another debt in another fashion. Meanwhile, he got through the days as usual—working till the evening, when he had generally some engagement to fulfil.

His popularity in society was by no means decreased by the rumours that had reached many a drawing-room, that the painter added to his other attractions the delightful one of a little wickedness.

Somehow Erlsourt did not care for this popularity even as much as he might have done a year ago.

Impossible as it was to spoil him, still he would have found it pleasant to have so many doors set wide for him to enter, so many kindly hands held out in welcome. Now he did not appreciate it.

It seemed to set him still further from Violet. She was shut out from a society to which he had the free entrée. He had taken a step above her—he who would have taken the lowest place so it had been at her side. He saw her but once during these few days; then he was grave and preoccupied, sitting by her, and watching the white fingers amongst the delicate lace she was working. Violet made one or two efforts to rouse him, rallied him, laughingly, on his silence—and laughter was very far from her that day—but she could not succeed. He only smiled and answered,—

"One can't always wear a mask, Violet! It is such a relief to drop it for once."

Their future hung so dark before them. How did he know—how did either know, for Violet was quick to feel why he was in this unwelcome mood—what a few hours might bring forth? what their position to each other would be? Honour might be gained at so dear a price!

Violet gave no hint of her knowledge as to his movements till he was going. He had held her in a clasp that said so plainly, "I will not let you go," that she had felt its meaning in every fibre of her being; but when he released her, reluctantly even then, she kept hold of his hand with both hers.

"Leigh," she said, "you remember your promise?"

"Yes, I remember it."

"And you will remember it when you are most tried, and keep it?"

Those eyes, with untold sweetness in them, subdued him, compelling him to obedience.

"Yes," he said again, quietly. His lips pressed hers once more; no farther word passed between them. So, bound in fetters that he could not break, however tempted, he met Gilbert Venner the next night. It was as well he was not free—he knew that the minute he saw Venner. He did not join him then; he merely nodded to him across the room, and sat down to play with another man. He wanted to regain the self command that had been momentarily shaken. It was not done in a minute; it was so hard to keep cool—so much harder for him than it would have been for others of a different temperament.

He noticed everything that night; his

faculties seemed strained to their sharpest. George King came in. He seemed uneasy, looking about for some one; but he was short-sighted, and did not see directly the person he wanted. A few minutes afterwards Erlsourt noticed him talking to Venner. Venner laughed, and appeared to treat lightly the subject under discussion. They, both still talking, came towards where the painter sat. He heard George say, "Then you think I can go?" and Venner answered, "Why, of course, without a shadow of doubt." George then went out of the room.

Laughter and loud voices as usual filled the room; attendants went round noiselessly, supplying fresh cards and wine. The talk—by no means refined, and interlarded with many a perfectly unnecessary word—Erlsourt heard without heeding it. His mind took in but what one man said—his eyes noted all he did. So that, when Venner rose, and, after chaffing for five minutes with another man, left the room, Erlsourt said at once to his companion, looking meanwhile at his watch,—

"Would you mind letting our game wait awhile? I have an engagement, but I will be back as soon as I can."

"Certainly, with pleasure!" said the other, affably. "We can finish it later; we each know our hand."

But the game never was finished.

Erlsourt thanked him, and went out—not through the hall, but up the stairs, to the door of George King's private room—whatever within him he was fighting down, whatever blanks stretching away before him he was trying to ignore, there was not much outwardly to show it, except unusual paleness, and a hard look in the eyes.

The hand he laid on the look was perfectly steady. As he went in, in obedience to Venner's "Come in," his voice was as clear as ever, perhaps a little lower; but that might have been from caution.

"There's that account of ours to settle, Venner," he said, with no conscious choice of the words as including a double meaning.

"Oh, ah!" said Venner, with affected carelessness, for he was never really careless about money. "You need not have troubled. But how did you know I was here? This is King's room!"

"Oh," said the other, significantly, "I know you've the free run of it."

"The devil you do!" said Venner, his uneasy laugh concealing but feebly the savagery in his tone. "My dear fellow, you know a great deal more than I do!"

"I think not," said Erlsourt, quietly counting out the amount of his debt in gold pieces. He had no intention of passing paper with Venner to-day. How could he tell what might happen? He wanted no trace that they had met.

He handed the money to Venner, waited till the latter had placed it in his purse, then, still standing by the table, said, in the same intensely quiet way as before,—

"Before I leave you I have something further to say."

Venner glanced at him suspiciously. He did not like the look of him. He had enough quickness—or fear—to see that the words meant something more than they seemed to.

"What do you mean?" he demanded, roughly. "You are using rather an odd tone, Erlsourt."

Erlsourt went on without noticing the interruption.

"What I have to say concerns a story you told me once, which you left unfinished. If you will answer truthfully the question I shall put to you, give me the proof of its truth that you have about you, I shall leave this room, and you will hear nothing more of me, nor will any claim be made in consequence of your answer."

Venner had gone livid, and his hand had been lifted half way to his breast-pocket, but dropped again as he recollected himself.

"What story, what question?" he said, angrily. "What the devil do you mean—

threatening me, too—there was a threat in what you said!"

"I meant there to be!"

He moved a step nearer, still heaping both the door he had entered by and the little door on his left nearer to him than to Venner.

"Seven years ago you, not as Gilbert Venner but as Edgar Marsden, went through a ceremony of marriage with the girl whose story you told me—Violet Herbert. Answer me, before Heaven, which was the lie—that marriage or your denial of it to her?"

For a second the two men faced each other in deadly silence. Venner had the horror of uncertainty as to the man he was dealing with, added to the bewilderment that staggered him.

Who was he, who had been his dupe all these weeks, who knew all the secrets of his black life, and dragged them to the front, while he flung a threat at him?

His stupid dupe, whom he had thought his companion in vice, standing there to champion the cause of a dead woman who had been wronged.

But he could throw his pitiful sneer at him, and he threw it, recovering his lost ground as well as he could.

"So you're a hypocrite, after all," he said, "trying to force me to tell you my affairs, coming here to worm yourself into my confidence night after night. My follies are nothing to you, and the women you talk of is dead—unless—ah!" he cried, forgetting himself in a sudden flash of conviction, "you painted that picture that has got her eyes—her haunting eyes! You know her—she has sent you! She is not dead! Go back to her—tell her—"

"Stay!" said Erlsourt, sternly. "Think well of the terms I offer before you utter another lie! Yes, I know her; but let her name alone if you care about your life. I know what you are here—not a member, but a part proprietor. I have but to give notice, and you are ruined."

"Further, I know that you cheat at play—that you have cheated me and others. I have but to say the word, and you are cast out from all society but that of blacklegs like yourself. So much I have found out here. If you deny my right to question you, you do it at your own cost. You yourself, having been my tool, have given me the means with which to make this demand. Now choose!"

He had curbed himself so far because he had promised; he had stooped to make terms, to parley, where he was burning to annihilate. But he had promised; and for that, and the memory of the eyes that had looked into his, and the lips that had kissed his, he held himself in check. He was watchful of Venner, and took from his breast, unnoticed, the tiny pistol.

"Hm!" sneered Venner, for he was not deficient in brute courage; he could defy if he was too prudent to attack. "I see it all. She always had a pretty face, and you want to get her for yourself. I didn't know you were so particular about other men's wives."

"Take care!" said the other, hoarsely. "You will not answer my question?"

"Show me your right to ask it?" said Venner, with a laugh, but he restrained somewhat. "Marry her—you can't hurt her."

Erlsourt sprang forwards, blazing with passion, and flung himself on Venner so suddenly, with a blow so truly directed, so strong, that the man reeled, caught blindly at a chair near him, missed it, and crashed to the ground.

Before he could stir Erlsourt had one knee on his breast. The moment was worth a lifetime of agony. The wild savage exultation sent the blood through his veins like fire. For the moment he was half mad. This dastard life at his feet, shrinking beneath the gleam of the pistol, he would end!

"Are you going to kill me?" whispered the wretched wretch, opening glazed eyes of terror. "Have you—have you no care for your own life?"



[ERLSCOURT TOOK THE PAPER WITH ONE HAND, KEEPING THE PISTOL IN POSITION WITH THE OTHER.]

"None—no more than I have for yours. Dare to stir, to call out, and I shall shoot you. Give me that certificate you have!"

"I haven't—"

Erlscourt wrenched open Venner's coat and vest.

"Don't lie to me now," he said. "I care for nothing under Heaven but to crush you. Give me the paper!"

Venner, trembling and half stunned, slowly drew forth a folded paper. Erlscourt took it from him, opened it with one hand, keeping the pistol in its position with the other.

For a second the lines all waved up and down, he felt his heart growing cold, his eyes dim. Then two names grew out of the darkness—Edgar Henry Marsden. Violet Muriel Herbert; then a third, John Walsh.

"You told your wife," he said, and his eyes flashed as he uttered the word, "you told her this man was no priest. Who was he?"

Venner scowled without answering.

"Are you mad," said Erlscourt, bending over him, "to play with your life? I suppose you value it, such as it is. Answer at once!"

"He was a priest. He belonged to Sidney, Sussex. He was a friend of mine."

"Is he alive?"

"No."

"Go on," said Erlscourt, thrusting the paper into his breast. "I have no time to lose."

"He had got into trouble—owed money. He was hiding at Pennvale—in that cottage. He was in my pay."

"Where did he come from—what living or curacy?"

"He'd a curacy at Wells, in Somerset—St. Frideswide."

If he suffered an agony, lying there helpless, with twenty people in the house, what did the man suffer who knelt beside him? A thousand things he could have said kept surging in his heart, but choked him as he tried to utter them.

What words ever framed by man could

scathe and trample enough on this creature, who, like a reptile, had left his loathsome stain on a pure soul? What but his blood could really avenge one tear of Violet's, one cry for her lost honour, one bitter throb of shame? What but his blood? And yet he had promised. He could feel even in this maddened moment the soft lips on his, could see the tender eyes.

"Take your cursed life!" he broke out, suddenly. "Say what you will—of me; I shall know how to answer it. Don't lift a word against the woman who is your wife, whom you would have ruined if you had dared. You did your best. I set myself to wring the truth from you, to avenge her, and I have done it. You who thought me the fool were fooled at my will. You betrayed where you kept this paper, you betrayed that you had married the girl; but I wanted proof, and I have got it. Step by step I have traced it out and doped you. Coward! who laughed at an agency you could not fathom—who tried to crush the child you had betrayed, it is your turn now! I would to Heaven I had my own way. I would kill you!"

"Don't kill me!" Venner groaned; putting up his hands. "It is all dark. I am dying!"

Erlscourt, not heeding him, turned his head towards the door. The noise and laughter he had heard faintly all the time, had changed. There were strange sounds below—loud cries, shouts, turmoil, the rush of feet, the crash of breaking glass. He sprang up.

"The raid they promised!" he said, under his breath. "I must not stay here."

He looked down again at Venner. He lay still, with closed eyes, breathing with difficulty—this husband of Violet Herbert, whom once she had loved, once caressed, once clung to, once believed in as her hero.

With a shudder Erlscourt turned away, crossed to the small door, and listened again. Yes, he heard George King's voice—they were coming upstairs to this room. He threw open the door, passed through without another

look, and shut it behind him gently. He was on a narrow landing, with a stairway going down. What if it led into the hall? No, it could not. He should have heard the noise more distinctly, whereas it was fainter.

Silently down the stairway into a little entry, from which a low window opened. Not a soul near. It was not fastened. He opened it, easily got out, and stood in a side street. It seemed empty, as if every soul had gone to swell the crowd before the club. He could hear the hum and inarticulate sounds, as he stood with the cool night air blowing on him, and the scene in that upstairs room growing like a hideous dream.

His hand went to his breast, clasping the paper hidden there—clasping it as he went quickly through back streets to his hotel, until he reached his room, unobserved by any one. Once there he locked the door and flung himself on the couch, hiding his face.

(To be continued.)

A most beautiful perambulator has just been made for a baby prince, which for perfection of shape, lightness, and finish is in every way worthy of the small Royal personage who will take his daily rides therein. The carriage is made in the successful "barouche" shape, with double coe springs, and is painted in two shades of dark green. The linings throughout are of dark green silk in a very rich quality, cushions, pillows, hood, and sides all being lined with silk to correspond. The apron is of green silk with an embroidered coronet and monogram, all the fittings are of silver, and a similar coronet with initials in silver finds a place outside the body of the carriage. In addition to the ordinary hood, there is a summer hood of tussore silk, bordered with frills of pale coffee mauve lace, and lined throughout with dark green silk.



["WILL YOU FORGIVE ME FOR RUSHING TO YOU FOR SHELTER, MRS. STUBBS? I AM WET THROUGH!" SAID LADY MURIEL.]

NOVELETTE—concluded.]

## HALF SISTERS.

—:—

### CHAPTER VII.

How long she lay thus she never knew, but she presently felt Fido licking her hands and then her face, and whining pitifully.

She sat up, dazed and half unconscious still. The afternoon shadows were lengthening in the winding vistas of the woods, and the scent of the woodbound flowers were heavy on the senses, as they become just before they close their sweetness for the night's repose.

How chilly and sick she felt! Was it tea time? Had she had dinner? She could not reckon time for her sharp misery.

She even fondled the poor whining little dog with no remembrance of how he came to be there. All at once she grasped his neck till he screamed with the pain, and this roused in her some spirit of ill, for she started up. Yes, it had been his dog; he had given it to her.

All her misery of humiliation rushed back upon her with agonising insistency. Her shame was too vivid to be borne. She was cheated, mocked, reviled.

By degrees her real nature reassured itself, and a wilful passion born of vanity swayed her whole being. It shook her weak form as wind would a trembling reed by the river's brim.

And aloud she vowed the insane vow that she would marry the first man that asked her, let him be who he may.

Fido frisked around her in mad doggieish delight, to hear her voice again. His antics roused a senseless fury in her over-wrought mind. Why should he—a mongrel cur he had called it—be so happy and gay when she was sick to death with misery?

She loosened her silk scarf, and twisting it

tightly to its neck she carried him to the centre pool of Atherley Woods, which she knew to be deep and cold.

Picking up with nervous haste a huge stone she inserted it in the folds of the silken scarf, and without looking once at the dog's eyes she threw him from her into the dank pool, and rushed wildly away, that she may not see him sink.

Weakly she staggered back to the tree under which she had sat with her false-hearted lover, and sank down, sobbing bitterly.

"Oh, my love, my love!" she cried, "my dear love." On the ground lay a glove of strong tanned leather. She caught it up, and kissed it passionately. Then the blind, unreasoning, senseless passion of a wilful and weak nature seized her again, and she tried to rend it in pieces, and panted with impatient anger that it was beyond her power.

While thus employed she heard a shambling tread, and turned to face Jabez Stubbs, the rich millowner, whom both her father and Uncle Tom were anxious she should marry.

The man was sufficiently young and good-looking enough, as simple country folk count looks. He was rich, and could give her a fine new home and a carriage. What did she want more?

She returned his rather shy "good evening" with a start of unaffected surprise. Was it so late? Yes, the evening shadows were creeping in and out amidst the trees. She had left Park Farm hours ago, and should have been at Homelands long since.

She stuffed the unyielding leather glove into her pocket, thinking "how different this man is to Sir Guy!—how exactly the opposite to what that lying gipsy had promised her she should marry."

Was it only yesterday that happened in Willow Lane. It seems to her now to have happened months ago.

"You are alone, Miss Netta, and it's getting a bit late," said Jabez Stubbs, to whom speech never came with pleasant readiness.

"Have you lost your way?" he continued, vaguely. "These paths are a bit bothersome."

"I—believe I have," said Netta wearily, "lost my way," and she smiled a poor little sickly faint smile, but one that somehow cheered Mr. Stubbs wonderfully.

As a rule, she was saucy, rude and defiant to him; now her manner was altogether humble and new to him. He coveted this girl's beauty, but hitherto had had no hope; now a sudden impulse was upon him to dare his fate to win or lose.

There were traces of tears on her bonny face. She was still, repressed, and quiet, and she looked at him almost hopelessly.

"You are a bit out of sorts, Miss Netta. Have you been ill?" he asked, tenderly enough, wondering in his mind just what was up to change her so.

"I really don't know, Mr. Stubbs," she made answer hopelessly. "I think it is—the heat."

"You are tired, maybe?" was his next query, and his nervousness grew upon him.

"Yes," she said, in a thin, despairing voice, which, being utterly new to him, was fraught with joyful meaning. "I am tired of everything—tired to death."

And then Jabez Stubbs, a heavy-headed, good-enough fellow in the main, pleaded his cause not unmanfully; and Netta Wilding, in sweet Atherley Woods—on the exact spot where Sir Guy had parted from her—listened dumbly to love vows which she at least knew were honest and true; and, without dreaming the great wrong she was doing him, presently made slow, distinct answer, while her heart contracted with a shuddering fear born of its intense pain,—

"Yes, I will marry you whenever you like, only"—and this between lips that shook as if with palsy—"please let it be soon."

A week later, when everyone had grown accustomed to the news that Sir Guy Martin was to be married in London to the proud

Lady Maribel Mountcastle, and that Farmer Wilding's eldest daughter was to marry Mr. Jabez Stubbs, the rich miller, the candles were lighted rather earlier than usual in the cheerful living room of Park Farm, for the new inmate, the young engineer, was momentarily expected.

He and his father were coming from Southampton in time for supper, and supper was ready this quarter of an hour or more, and now Mrs. Wilding had left Annabel to put the finishing touches to the bouquet of flowers that stood on the centre of the table in a high-cut silver glass, while she went upstairs to see, for the hundredth time, that the best spare bedroom was in complete readiness.

There was a creaking sound on the gravel by the stableyard gate, and Annabel looked out of the porch to see, in the shadowy light, an open-topped carriage with two men in it, and her father and Frank Olivant standing beside them in light conversation as they dismounted.

The two old gentlemen came on first towards the house, and behind them she saw that the stranger within their gates was a much taller fellow than Frank Olivant, and that he walked with an air that bespoke him of considerably more importance.

Perhaps it was quite natural that Frank Olivant, being so far a resident of the house, should carry the manifold signs and travelling impediments of the new comer; still Annabel was vaguely angry to see that he should also burden himself with an ungainly three-legged sort of contrivance, which she discovered afterward was called a theodolite.

Mrs. Wilding was at the front door in hospitable country fashion to meet them, and young Mr. Standing, erect and bareheaded under the porch lamp, was not a bad figure to look at.

There was unmistakable power in his general physique, and in his manner there was a hearty brave assurance that won him friends at once, and warded off enemies.

As Farmer Wilding said afterwards in the sanctity of the conjugal bed chamber,—

"He was a fine up-standing young chap, with no nonsense about him."

Mrs. Wilding was not other than prepossessed, but she reserved her opinion. The stranger's manner had a bit nonplussed her. He had apparently taken everything, herself included, for granted, and acted accordingly.

Without being in the least rude or self-asserting, he settled down on the instant into her house as his home, and made himself welcome to the good things therein. He had not talked over much at supper, but what he did say was to the point.

Then he had behaved to her as if such a thing as her being other than a well-bred person, and eminently agreeable as a hostess, could not be possible.

He had looked after her comfort in handing her table requisites, and had helped her to the thin home-brewed with an air that spoke of claret or hook being quite as much in his line.

He had promptly risen to open the door for herself and Annabel when they had retired for the night, and, indeed—for such little things were properly reckoned by the ex-housekeeper—brought within her doors manners of good society, which half pleased her and half perplexed her.

She said little to her husband. It was her way to think subjects over quietly and take her own bearings, before she spoke openly. And things, on the whole, seemed altering a good deal.

Here was Nettie going to be married at once, in what seemed to her almost indecent haste, for the girl was urgent in her desire to be married now, without loss of time.

Mrs. Wilding had never scented the love affair with Sir Guy, so that she did not connect Nettie's conduct with him in any shape.

And then there was trouble looming at States Martin, for twice during the week she

had been summoned to Lady Martin's bedside—once in the dead of night—to see her convulsed with heart spasms, of which the doctors had privately informed her her ladyship must die, and that soon.

If she had ever given Sir Guy a thought as a dangerous acquaintance for her husband's girls her thoughts would most likely have flown to Annabel, for it was of her he had always spoken most admiringly, and it was to her he invariably talked before her face. But this very day he had been married in great state at London to Lady Maribel Mountcastle.

"So far," resumed Mrs. Wilding, "so good!"

She lay long pondering over these things in her mind after the honest farmer was snoring—that unwelcome music of the weary—and one thing she felt tolerably sure of was that young Standish was certainly a superior young man for his class in life, and that he was beyond a doubt very much struck by her husband's daughter Annabel.

"And now that Nettie is safely engaged," she considered, as she gazed her unmused husband on that he should turn over and so snore less heartily, "she can't well step in and upset the apple cart."

It would be well that Annabel should marry early and well, for business matters grew darker with each recurring season, and crops had an ugly way of failing lately, which secretly filled her with alarm.

As for poor Frank Olivant she knew he was fond of Annabel, but he was of the sort that would be likely to have his faithful affection unreturned a good many times. Girls nowadays were hard to please with so many new-fangled, fanciful notions, and somehow, men who were a bit overbearing and took things for granted generally got in and won while more deserving ones perhaps stood by and waited.

## CHAPTER VIII.

NETTIE'S marriage dated twelve months, and rumours were afloat "that it was strange Sir Guy Martin and his wife had not returned for his mother's funeral, and that nothing seemed to be known, even at the house, as to when they were coming back."

Things were going on very quietly at Park Farm, and it had become accepted quite as a matter of course that the two young men were at home therein, and that the two were on the most friendly terms. If either of them—or both of them—were in love with Annabel was an open question which no one, not even the most inveterate gossips, could decide.

These vague rumours of how things were with Sir Guy and his lady became louder as time went on, and it was thought still more odd that States Martin should be left in the power and hands of a handful of servants.

The stewards were in despair, and did all they could to silence the many reports that spread about.

"Why should it be strange," asked one, impatiently, "that young folks should prefer foreign travel even for two years instead of one?"

Sail the simple-minded, country-bred people on the large estates were not satisfied that all was well with the head of the house.

It had been so well known that Lady Maribel coveted the mistress-ship of the place. It was odd, more than odd, that she did not hurry back to take up her honors.

"They say," remarked Frank Olivant to Annabel, when spring was once more deepening into leafy June, "that now Sir Guy and Lady Maribel really are on their way home. It seems to be quite true, Miss Annabel, that they lead a very bad life. Incompatibility of temper I expect," and he laughed cheerily.

"I cannot bear listening to all the empty talk," said Annabel; "it may be all so untrue. I cannot think for my part why people

cannot mind their own business, and let that of other people alone!"

"They can't do it," said innocent Frank Olivant, hitting upon a grave truth unawares. "There's something in most folks that won't let 'em rest till they can count up their neighbour's chickens—and hatch 'em too."

He spoke irritably, and Annabel glanced up from her plain needlework a trifle anxiously.

"Are you vexed about anything?" she asked, dropping her eyes once more on the shirt-front she was stitching, for in those days farmers' daughters did a great deal of fine stitching.

"I am a bit," he said, honestly. "Oh! Miss Annabel, you could put it all right if you only would."

"Now, Frank, this is the old forbidden subject," said the girl, softly. "Don't hark back upon it; it is so useless."

"Will it be always useless, Annabel?"

His voice was hoarse and thin with pain, and his fingers trembled as he sorted and re-sorted odd reels and balls of cotton in the neat-wicker work-basket which was placed for convenience of the worker on a small table by the window.

"Always, always! I cannot say anything else, dear Frank Olivant, except that, as you know, I am so sorry, for I like you very much indeed."

"But yet you cannot love me?" Annabel shook her head sadly, and her busy hands dropped lightly into her lap.

Frank Olivant was intent on trying whether a certain bodkin he had picked out of the work-basket would, by process of insertion, go into two reels of cotton and connect them effectually, and a speech was upon his tongue that he found difficult to put into words.

Like all good-meaning, nervous men, he started this by venturing a totally irrelevant remark.

"I have been to the Abbey Mill to-day. Nettie's baby grows prettier every day. It seems to quite know me now. Miss Annabel, I could give you quite as good a home as Abbey Mill. Now that my old godmother is dead expense will be no object so far."

"All that makes no difference. You know," laying her hand upon his arm, "that it could not."

The reels of cotton were replaced, and a ball of worsted chosen to fiddle with, and the veins in the restless fidgety hands stood up like whipcord as the next sentence was jerked out.

"There is somebody else, Miss Annabel!"

A long pause, during which the stitching was resumed with desperate energy.

"I think you might tell me. It is the only thing that can cure me of my craving for you. Miss Annabel, I could never hanker after a woman that I know cared for somebody else."

For answer the girl, thus driven to bay, burst into hurried weeping, which distressed Frank Olivant, her patient and persistent lover.

"I see!" was all he said, and, rising, he walked unsteadily from the room, leaving her alone in the sunny window.

After drying her eyes she proceeded mechanically to tidy the work-basket, which Frank Olivant had left at sixes and sevens. It was against her nature to have any of her belongings littered and in confusion.

Now, I fancy a woman's character may be pretty correctly judged by her work-basket. They differ so, do these work-baskets. Some are dainty satin-lined affairs, that intimate no such thing as toil in connection with needlework.

The tiny, useless looking scissors, and the heavily embossed apologetic looking thimbles, and gilt-headed stilettos and bodkins lie about as if much too fine for anything but the slightest fancy work.

Some are ugly, plain-looking baskets, masses of wools and worsted clog the needles and other implements to a hopeless degree, and dust is thick upon the whole.

There are some work-baskets so absurdly

prim in their epic-and-span tidiness that here, too, honest work seems out of the question, and the basket itself seems a calm assertion of staid fastidiousness.

Annabel Wilding's rank under neither of these heads. It was a neat, useful, but sufficiently pretty wicker arrangement which held easily all that it was required to contain, and seemed always to say, "Here is all you can possibly want, and not difficult to find either."

The scissors were capable-looking implements, and the thimble was plain, of good solid silver, and with holes in it, giving proof of the owner's industry.

Very thoughtful was Annabel as she put all in order within this receptacle, and a quick blush flitted now and again across the clear fairness of her face.

"How could I have been so silly as to cry?" she thought. "What did he think? Poor Frank! And how he would despise me if he knew that I, whom he thinks so proud, have given away my love unsought. Oh, how I wish he had never come!"

Again hot tears fell among the reels and bodkins, and Annabel rose hastily, and went with rapid footsteps to her own room.

To whom had she given her love unsought? As she sat thinking painfully of her unfortunate interview, for unfortunate it was in her eyes, since she had admitted so much by those foolish tears, a quick footstep sounded on the stair, and a rich voice sang a snatch of a merry song, a door on the opposite landing was opened and banged too.

It was Robert Standing, and by the thrill that passed over Annabel Wilding we can arrive at the answer to our question.

Ever since Netta's marriage Annabel's life had been pleasanter. The two agreed much better apart, and the introduction of fresh ways into the house by reason of Robert Standing had imperceptibly brought about many small changes which tended to peace, where hitherto had reigned more or less discontent.

For one thing, it cannot be denied that a vast improvement was effected by this young gentleman's presence in Mrs. Wilding herself. That lady found it impossible to carp and fume quite so much before his daring, merry railleury. In a way she feared him as much as she liked him.

It was her way to like successful people, and this young man seemed made of this stuff; that most things he undertook were carried through, if not by easy means then at the point of the bayonet.

He rather liked Mrs. Wilding than not; and, truth to tell, since Netta was not there to fret her so much she was not so disagreeable. But he never by any chance gave in to her unpleasant humours, but openly rallied her upon them, as the same time devoting himself to her comfort in many ways that tended to flatter her vanity and procure her goodwill.

Presently the opposite door was opened again, and Robert Standing apparently stood a moment considering something, for Annabel, listening, did not hear his retreating footsteps. Usually he was quick and decisive in his movements, and bounded up and down stairs two or three steps at a time.

"Miss Annabel," he called, in rather lowered tones, "are you there—in your room?"

Annabel blushed hotly, but did not answer till the handle of her door was imperiously rattled.

"Yes," she said, rather coldly it must be confessed. "I am here!"

She stood facing him on the landing. What he had been about to say did not escape him at sight of her face.

"You are troubled about something, Miss Annabel? Anything gone wrong in the domestic orbit? Can I do anything?" smiling, as he slyly pointed to Mrs. Wilding's room. "My influence over the good lady is always at your service. Indeed," falling into seriousness, "it is entirely for your sake that

I exert it. You know that, do you not?" He hesitated and coloured all over his handsome dark face; he had almost said "dear."

A looker-on at these two would have seen clearly that Annabel's tears for having given her love unsought was quite unnecessary.

"Did you want me?" she asked, nervously.

"Yes, I want you very much indeed," smiling down upon her, "to walk with me to the Abbey Mill, will you? I hate tramping about alone after working hours are over, and I'm in a bit of a fix. Look here, I have bought that blessed baby of Mrs. Stubbs's this," holding out from his coat-pocket a coral and bells of the most elaborate description, "and I want you to help me out at the presentation. I am desperately afraid of babies!"

"Yes, I can come if you like!" said Annabel, with a lovely shy blush, and retreating inside her room to get ready.

"Thanks!" in a tone of great relief. "I'll make it all right downstairs. I shall enjoy the walk through the woods so much better than riding over. I've been riding all day; and, besides, I have something I want to consult you about."

Annabel heard this, and wondered. And then he ran downstairs in his usual noisy fashion, and she heard him interviewing Mrs. Wilding to the effect that he had been begging Miss Annabel to walk across to the Abbey Mill with him to tide him over the presentation of a coral and bells for the baby.

"And is there anything we can take for you?" he asked cheerily, "or anything, for that matter, that we can bring back for you? But," laughingly, "I always notice it is generally that things go from here, eh? Mistress Netta knows how to look after herself; and she has learned the art, known only they say to noble natures, of accepting benefits gracefully."

This was the sort of way in which Robert Standing invariably put Mrs. Wilding into good temper and won his own ends. He, too, knew exceedingly well how to take care of himself.

## CHAPTER IX.

As the two strolled along through the quiet country lanes, Robert Standing smoking a fragrant weed, and Annabel carrying very carefully a small bundle of delicate needlework she had done for this privileged infant, their talk deepened, as it generally did when they were together on other than simply the light topics of the day.

"Is Sir Guy Martin a nice fellow?" asked Robert Standing rather suddenly, between one subject and another.

Annabel looked up, rather astonished at the direct question, and met a look bent keenly upon her which astonished her still more.

"Why?" she asked.

"Because I want to know—just your own opinion," flicking the ash steadily from his cigar. "One hears such odd things about him and his marriage and his former loves."

"His former loves!" said Annabel, still astonished, but smiling frankly. "I did not know he had any!"

Robert Standing walked on in silence for a few yards.

"Then it is not you whom it is openly said he is afraid to face on coming back here?"

Annabel, instead of walking on in silence, stood stock still.

"Indeed, no!" she said. "What is it they say? Please tell me in precise words."

"You will excuse my plain-speaking."

"Certainly I will. I wish you to speak openly since you have said so much."

"For reasons of my own I am glad I have spoken of it. It has been on my mind for a good while, that is, so far as you were concerned."

"Do people," very much startled, "dare

to speak of me in connection with him—Sir Guy Martin? It is too absurd for anything."

"Miss Wilding no names are exactly spoken, but it is said that the reason he does not come back here is that he was so much in love with some farmer's pretty daughter that he cannot face her after his marriage. It is also said that Lady Muriel is furiously jealous of him, and that they have open quarrels, and that he drinks very hard."

This story does not bear on me in any degree at all, Mr. Standing, or I would tell you so honestly. I cannot account for it even unless—" and she came abruptly to a dead stop.

"Yes—unless what?" said Robert Standing. "Do not be afraid to go on. Now that I am assured, and you cannot know how light-hearted it makes me that it is not you, I think I can venture a pretty shrewd guess. Was it Mrs. Netta?"

"That I don't know," answered Annabel, frankly. "Absurd reports spread about these out-of-the-way country places, and some said he was very fond of her. For myself, I do not think so, or else—"

"You think he would have married her? It might have been a case of *noblesse oblige* with him, you see, Miss Wilding. All along I have thought, I freely confess, that it was—that it must have been you, and that in some sort of way you were hurt by his conduct, for that you are in some secret trouble I think is quite sure. Am I not right, and cannot I in any way help you? I cannot bear to see a woman suffer—least of all a young girl like you!"

"I in trouble! Oh, no! Indeed you are wrong, very—"

"I do not think I am so very far wrong, Miss Annabel. You seem to me to have something weighing on your mind. I thought it was this. It only shows what blundering idiots we men are."

A choking sensation prevented the girl from speaking, and the two walked on somewhat faster. Unconsciously Annabel had increased her pace.

"Do you know why I am so glad to have spoken, and so eased my mind, Annabel?"

It was the first time Robert Standing had ever called her by her Christian name, but instead of blushing, as some girls would have done, she looked at him with disquiet coldness.

He was not abashed though he said, "forgive me," readily enough. He was not the sort to like easy game, and admired her chill dignity. She was a woman worth the winning; and now that her heart was free of what he had thought was burdening it, he meant going in to win.

"It is," he went on, "for a purely selfish reason. Miss Wilding I want to make running on my own account. Is there any hope for me? I do not wish to startle you, but let me speak freely. From the first moment I saw you I liked you. I know now that I loved you then as I love you now; but the idea took possession of me and held to me that you were in love, unfortunately, with this Sir Guy Martin. Thinking this, and that he had ill-used you, I hated the sound of his name. Hush!" as she would have spoken. "Let me now speak out fairly all that is in my mind, and then I will tell you what it is that has compelled me to speak of this matter to you, and hear the truth from your lips. I saw Frank Olivant's plight from the first, and, in fact, he very early in our acquaintance took me into his confidence. Here was another reason why I should stifle my own feelings and stand aside. But not an hour ago he came to me and told me that he had asked you for the last time, and that, for a certain reason, he should never, so long as he lived, ask you again."

Annabel now was as red as a June rose. What had poor outspoken foolishly fond Frank Olivant told? she wondered.

"If he does carry his heart on his sleeve he is a downright, simple-hearted good fellow!" said Robert Standing, cordially; "and were it not for pure selfishness, as I say, I could fain plead his cause."

"He has done so for himself," said Annabel, in a strange mixture of heat and coldness, "and failed."

"Pardon me, Miss Wilding, did he think you were in love with Sir Guy?"

"Dear me, no!" said Annabel, hurriedly, frightened out of her calm coldness. "How on earth should he?"

"He seemed certainly to infer to me that it was because he had discovered you were in love with someone else that he will not ask you again. I am at sea!"

"How excessively stupid of him! I told him no such thing."

"He inferred it."

"How can I help," pettishly, for she was at her wits' end, "what he infers?"

"Then he, too, is at fault?"

Poor Annabel! What could she say next? Was ever truthful, honest-hearted girl so pestered?

Was ever woman so utterly nonplussed by the love-making of two desirable wooers?

Before more can be said they are at the gates of Abbey Mill, and Annabel passed swiftly into where Netta sits in a well-furnished room, nursing her chubby infant.

She is prettily attired in a loose strawberry-coloured wrapper trimmed with heavy laces—for Netta in no wise spares her husband's purse-strings—and welcomes her unexpected visitors cordially.

"You have just escaped a heavy shower!" she remarked, in a casual sort of way, handing over the baby to a trim nursemaid.

The rain, even as she spoke, pattered against the window; and two people, not half a mile distant from the house, likewise felt its sudden onslaught.

They were riding sharply along the broad high road, a man and a woman—no other than Sir Guy Martin and Lady Muriel, his wife.

They had at last come down upon States Martin the night before, without letter or warning to anyone. Lady Muriel had carried her point.

"Upon my word," she was saying to Sir Guy, "you are a charmingly lively companion! If this is coming back home to the acres of one's ancestors I don't see much in it, after all!"

Sir Guy did not deign to answer except by bending his head low over his horse's neck to escape the driving shower of summer rain.

Presently he finds she is turning into a private road on her left.

"Where are you going, Muriel?" he asked, sharply.

"For shelter. My habit is thin, and I don't want to be laid up with lumbago."

She rides determinately onward, and he knows he is powerless to check her wilful course. She is making straight for the Abbey Mill, her father's property, and rented by his tenant, Jabez Stubbs.

What could he say? She had right and reason on her side, and she very well knew. What else she knew he did not care to ask, as he saw the scornful light on the dark, handsome face of the woman who, albeit his wife, he feared and hated.

"We have little right to intrude on these people," was what he did say in meek protest.

For all answer she put her horse at a low-sunk fence skirting the ground, and against his will Sir Guy was bound to follow her.

Galloping across a paddock and into the well-kept entrance drive, she pulled up at the front door of the substantial house, and rapped it sharply with her riding whip.

Her behest was quickly answered, and, dismounting, she cried quite pleasantly,—

"Ah! Mrs. Stubbs, I believe. Will you forgive me for rushing to you for shelter. I am wet through, and cry your pity. Miss Wilding, I believe," bowing carelessly to Annabel, and glancing at Robert Standing inquiringly. "I think you know me," to Netta. "I am Lady Martin!"

Netta had known her quite well, and her

gaze went past the tall, masculine figure to Sir Guy, still on his horse at the doorway.

"Mr. Standing," she said, quietly, "Lady Muriel Martin," by way of introduction, and Lady Muriel wondered where such girls got their manners from. As for Robert Standing, noting his bearing, she laughed upon him cordially.

"I wish," she said, "you would help my husband from taking cold by lifting him bodily out of the saddle if he proves restive. A man with influenza is too unbearable for anything, and that will be the upshot if he persists in getting wet."

There was a wicked, malicious gleam in her fine black eyes, as Robert went to invite Sir Guy to enter.

"You seem very comfortable in this roomy old house," she said next, to Netta. "How pretty you have made this room! Now, I can order the fitting-up of stables and saddle rooms, but for the life of me I know nothing about the arranging of house furniture—anti-macassars, and all the rest of it."

Sir Guy was in the room by this time, muttering something about unwarrantable intrusion, but Netta and Annabel shook hands with him, and politely disclaimed any such apology.

The baby, looking contented and radiant, was in its mother's arms again, the maid having hastily restored it to answer the door to Lady Muriel.

Netta rather ostentatiously, Annabel thought, kept it instead of giving it back to the maid, and Lady Muriel laughed curiously.

"You are proud of your baby, Mrs. Stubbs?"

"Very!" said Netta, quietly.

"Pray let Sir Guy look at it. He is so fond of children. I assure you, my dear little woman," with the insulting condescension of a great lady, "he considers it sufficient punishment for all his sins that he is doomed to be a childless husband."

Annabel blushed, and wondered why Netta's eyes should shine with such an exultant light. Her face was flushed with rosy light, and motherhood had as yet but added to her charms.

She was looking lovely, and Sir Guy looked just about as uncomfortable under his ordeal as it was possible for a man to be.

Wine was brought in, as was the custom in those days, and while the three women kept up a running fire of small talk, Sir Guy and Robert Standing chatted "horses" to the mutual content of each. As a matter of fact, the two men had a bond in common, and rather took to each other.

Robert Standing, being a clear-sighted young fellow, thought he saw exactly how the land lay. He was amused, but, manlike, he rather pitied Sir Guy, who, he could plainly see had somewhat too much of a bargain in Lady Muriel.

The rain ceasing the horses were brought round; and Lady Muriel, instead of allowing Sir Guy to mount her, summoned young Standing to her aid.

"You are fond of horses, Mr. Standing?" she said, in her loud, contemptuous tones. "You must come to States Martin and see our stud and my Russian ponies; queer little devils they are!"

## CHAPTER X.

BACK through the evening lanes again went Robert Standing and Annabel, and naturally their former talk was resumed after they had discussed the strangeness of their having thus met Sir Guy and Lady Muriel.

"I want you to decide something for me," said Robert, quite abruptly. "You know the good offer I have got to go to France on this new railway. I had another urgent letter this morning, and I want to decide it at once. Am I to go or not?"

"Will it be for your good?" asked Annabel, evasively. Not yet was she accustomed to

the idea of his submitting his affairs to her guidance, although she had admitted that perhaps there might be that chance he had asked for. More she would not say.

"Certainly," he answered, "for my advancement in the profession. It is a splendid offer, and one only given me through high influence."

"Then why not take it?" but to his supreme delight he saw that her lips trembled.

"Annabel," he said, bending down very low over her and laughing into her eyes, "you have not been quite frank with me, except in so far as Sir Guy is concerned. I begin to see through a glass darkly. It is somebody else you have been in love with all this time. Is it with me, darling?"

A ripple of happy laughter escaped from Annabel, which was the only answer she vouchsafed to her commanding lover, but it satisfied him well enough; and little recked either of them that Mrs. Wilding's face was somewhat dark, as they had kept supper waiting.

Frank Olivant during the meal was very silent, as was Annabel, but Robert Standing made talk enough and to spare, recounting their adventure at the Abbey Mill, and his opinions of Sir Guy Martin and Lady Muriel.

Mrs. Wilding was interested, in spite of herself, to hear that at last they were back, and she looked very sharply at Annabel. That astute lady, be it known, had more than once been led astray by the girl's self-contained manner and evident trouble—a trouble that she had dated back to the time of Sir Guy's sudden marriage.

In a way it had drawn the child to her, for to her it savoured somewhat of compliment that anyone should admire the inmates of States Martin. Of Netta she had never thought in connection with him, as we have said before. Hence her kindness of late to Annabel; for she, reading her guilty secret, as she flattered herself, was not ill-natured or unkindly of youth and its woes.

A little angry she had been with thoughtless Sir Guy, but being away he had escaped her reproaches, for she was quite sure of Annabel's pride and upright conduct. She had always credited Sir Guy with all the blame, if blame there were. Now here he was back and flaunting Lady Muriel in her face, and Mrs. Wilding scanned that face sharply, and was puzzled.

Had she heard a conversation half-an-hour later in the upper gardens, as Robert Standing and Frank Olivant smoked their last pipes, her eyes would have been opened indeed.

Said Frank Olivant,—

"There is no ill-feeling. Surely not, Standing, that you have won what I have lost. Don't think it for a moment."

"All right, old man, but I wanted to tell you the first—she wished it too—it is but fair. I hope we shall always be friends—real good friends. You will act a brother's part to her while I am gone? Am I asking too much?" as no reply came.

"I can't promise that much just yet," said poor Frank, quite humbly. "I'm off myself for a week or two, and when I come back, if I do come back, I will tell you straight. Whichever way it is you will know that I am doing all I can for the best."

"Yes, old fellow; but cheer up, and we shall see you happy yet."

"I ought to have seen all along how it was," said he, ruefully, "but, somehow, I didn't. I just went blundering on."

"I say, Frank," said the other, "did you think, as I did, that she was in love with Sir Guy Martin—had been before his marriage, I mean?"

"Lord, no!" came the surprised and prompt answer. And Frank laughed aloud.

"All the same, I have my reasons for thinking the old lady did," nodding his head in the direction of the house.

"Ah! she never spotted that little game," said Frank, laughing a little still. "Netta was too deep for her!"

"It was Netta Wilding, then?"

"Of course it was. He treated her rascally bad, too, I'll say that much, and she showed more spirit than I thought she had when she turned about and married Stubbs. I like Netta well enough; she was always very nice to me, you see!"

"And you were in her confidence then?"

"So far, as she told me right out, one night, why she was in such a deuce of a hurry to push on her marriage," he owned rather sheepishly. "I helped her, you see, by egging Stubbs on a bit, for he was a bit inclined to be slow, between you and me. As it was, she was married a fortnight after Sir Guy, and I saw that the announcement was put in all the papers, so he was bound to see it."

"Ah! it just about served him right. He isn't having a particularly good time, I should say, just now. Lady Muriel is a handful of devilry I shouldn't like to tackle myself."

"She was always a rum 'un!" admitted Frank, who ought to know something about it, as his family had rented under the Mount-astles for generations.

When Robert Standing went in he found, somewhat to his chagrin, that Annabel had escaped to bed on the all-round plea of a headache.

He followed the farmer upstairs, and shut his door, which was opposite hers, with a bang, but, in the reverberation, craftily opened it again to see Annabel do the same with hers to kiss her father good-night.

His eyes sparkled with mischief at the success of his ruse. She would not meet his eye, but yielded him a shy good-night. And how beautifully she blushed!

Mrs. Wilding was already in her room, and she fell to wondering why on earth her spouse did not follow her.

Then she opened her door to listen, and she heard he was in young Standing's room, and that the two were talking eagerly about something.

When he joined her he was looking grave—very grave, indeed.

"Well, mother!" seating himself on a wide chair instead of undressing himself in his usual hurried, scrambling fashion. "Here's a pretty how-to-do! Young Standing is off to France like a shot out of a shovel, and he wants to marry our Annabel!"

"Of course he does!" was his wife's answer, as she screwed up her side curls in whitey-brown paper. "That's no news to me!"

"No news to you! Blest if 'tisn't to me, then!"

Another twist of hair was then carefully tweaked up and placed within another scrap of paper, preparatory to the twisting process.

"Anybody could see with half an eye that he's had that in his head all along."

"Well," ruefully, it must be owned, "I always thought Frank Olivant would have come to me some day for Annabel; but as to young Standing, I'm jiggered if I saw anything."

"Men like you never do!"

The honest man wiped the perspiration from his face, but did not dispute his better half's words. He supposed she was right enough, as he found her to be, in the main.

"Now, I wonder," slowly undressing, "how long he has cared for the gel?"

"Who? Robert Standing?" asked his wife, putting on her net nightcap so that she looked exactly like a wise old owl. "Oh, I can tell you that!"

"The dickens you can!" The farmer was fairly agast. This banged Bannicker, to cull one of his own pet expressions.

"Well!"

"Well; I should say from the time he shook hands with her the night he first came, while you and his father were bustling about, supper being waiting, and forgetting to notice anything that was going on else. I never saw a man struck all of a heap in my life as he was. As for Annabel——"

"Ay! how about the gel?" asked the anxious father.

"That remains to be proved," said the sagacious little woman, looking now still more like an owl, for she had thriftily put out one candle, since her own toilet was finished, leaving her lord to manage as best he could. "Has he spoken to her?"

"Spoken to her! Yer, don't I tell you!" came testily from the good man's lips.

"No, that's just what you didn't tell me, Wilding, and how was I to know?"

"You somehow seems to scent out most things," he grunted. "Of course he's spoke to her to-night!"

"Ah!" said Mrs. Wilding, thinking that, after all, she had for once in her life not scented out everything that was going on under her nose. But this admission she wisely kept to herself.

Evidently the farmer was not elated by this news. He and the Olivants were friends of old and close standing.

In his heart he had always hoped one of his children would marry into the family. He was disappointed.

"He've let the grass grow under his feet, have that Frank," he grunted. "I'm always telling him he ain't half sharp enough!"

"He been sharp enough and plenty," said Mrs. Wilding, blowing out the remaining candle.

"How d'ye mean?" asked the poor bothered man. "You don't mean but for to own as he's let Standing get the start of him and walk clean over the ground, as he'll always do through everything?" grumbling himself into the wide fourposter.

"Well, he couldn't do more than keep on asking her, I suppose?" snapped Mrs. Wilding. "and if the girl said no, she said no? I suppose women, at any rate before marriage, can have their pick and choice of things?"

"Yes, if they gets a pick and choice," admitted he, testily, "but sometimes they takes what they can get, and generally comes the best off to my thinking."

This was a home thrust which Mrs. Wilding resented in her heart, but all she said was "that one didn't as a rule tell all one's chances—that for her part she always thought the least said was the soonest ended."

"When did he ask her?" asked the farmer, for his curiosity was sharply aroused, and all idea of sleep driven away from his eyes.

"Frank Olivant! Oh! about every three weeks, so far as I can judge."

Silence reigned, save for an oppressive masculine sigh now and again.

"Then you think as how she's been in love with young Standing all along?"

Mrs. Wilding was silent for a moment.

"I didn't say any such thing, Wilding," she made answer. "What I said was that it remained to be proved."

## CHAPTER XI.

It had been for some time understood that Mr. Robert Standing might leave the neighbourhood at any time, and go abroad—to France! The simple country people held him in a kind of reverence that such bold undertaking was contemplated.

A railway in France—away furrin! France to them was some distant land across seas; a frog-eating country, where the people spoke all the tongues of Babel.

But when it leaked out that Miss Annabel Wilding was engaged to this bold pioneer, the inhabitants of her village drew in their breaths aghast.

What! One of them, a fair, slim, slip of a girl marry a man who would perhaps force her to live in strange countries and among furriners! What could Farmer Wilding be thinking of? He may well go about with such a thoughtful face.

As in fact he did, for he felt it very hard upon him that Frank Olivant should go away

as he said for "a break;" but the farmer, now that his eyes were opened, knew what that meant. It was harder still that at Southampton market old Olivant should be gruff and cold to him, and that Mrs. Olivant should hope, in that freezing tone of hers, "that Miss Wilding would never repent the step she was taking, but that of course everybody knew their own business best."

Just after Christmas the sudden call for him to go came like a thunderbolt. Talk about soldiers having to start at a moment's notice! Why, young Standing was hurried off in a heathenish manner, with only three days' grace! Why, it was only time to well talk the thing over. And coming back in exactly three months' time to fetch his bride! Merciful powers! What next?

The consternation settled down gradually after the bold young man was gone, and Park Farm settled down into its accustomed calm—so still and silent it seemed without the two young men.

Lady Muriel, coming in promiscuously, chaffed Annabel roundly about losing both her swains at once, and seemed quite annoyed on her own account that the engineer had departed without even coming up to States Martin to bid her adieu, for in a way she had made a great deal of Robert Standing.

Things were not going well at States Martin. It was more than whispered that my lady was "gay," and that Sir Guy drank very hard, and that they quarrelled incessantly.

And at Abbey Mill?

Mr. Jabez Stubbs, although a quiet, rather sullen man, knew how to take care of his own. Once for all he told his wife, of whom he was still fond and indulgent, that he would stand no nonsense with the master of States Martin.

He let her know that he was well aware of those old love passages, and that he did not intend his honour to be trifled with; and Netta, somewhat to his surprise, was very patient and good, for she also knew how to value the good things that had come to her share.

She was, to be sure, still more extravagant in dress. She made a point of the drawing-room at Abbey Mill being freshly furnished in the latest and most approved style. She obtained the desire of her heart, a low phaeton and pair of ponies, instead of the old-fashioned fourwheeler and roan mare which had been good enough for his mother.

Still Jabez thought wisely. "I can afford it all, and it will please and content her. Evidently, 'laughing in his beard,' the little woman wants to let him see she ain't fretting, and that she's got all she wants." Jabez was flattered in his secret soul, and did not even kick over the traces when Netta took to reorganising his own wardrobe into something more fashionable—more befitting the well-to-do country gentleman, which it was her pleasure he should be. And the Stubbs' were all rich. It was a nasty name to be sure, but Netta did not see how she could alter that.

As for the baby, it was a marvel of beauty and painstaking care. Sir Guy could never leave his gates without meeting the dainty caravan of perambulator, and small, neatly-harnessed donkey, with its little padded saddle and ribbon-decorated whip. This whimsically accoutred beast was a parting present from Robert Standing.

Lady Muriel laughed aloud at the show that ridiculous little woman made of her brat.

"Just to spite you, eh, Guy?" she would say, openly. "See what you have missed! Fancy if that curly-headed little rascal were heir to States Martin!"

She seemed to take infinite pleasure in calling often at Abbey Mill, and making much of Netta and Jabez Stubbs. She would never buy or exchange a horse but Mr. Stubbs must come and give her his advice.

And once, in a mad freak, she hoisted the

baby before her on her side-saddle, and rode in amongst her houseful of guests at States Martin, introducing it as the future heir.

"Ah!" laughing loudly at her indecent joke, "you did not know we possessed a nursery at States Martin! Ha! ha! ha! we kept it so quiet, you see. Is he not a miracle of beauty, good people? Guy, my pet, why are you so sombre?" to her furious husband.

"I say," said a man whose name was much linked with hers, "you will go too far some day. He's got the devil's own work to keep down his temper. Don't be a fool. Let well enough alone."

But Lady Muriel only laughed the louder. Little recked she of coming ill so long as she pleased her own mad fancies.

There came a day when, perhaps, Sir Guy had been drinking harder than usual, for he came to Abbey Mill in the cool of the evening, and finding Netta alone in the old rose-garden he forgot Lady Muriel, he forgot Jabez Stubbs, he forgot honour and common decency.

All he remembered was that she was his little love, the girl who had spurned him in Atherley Woods, and so won his respect, and fastened her memory on his heart by that very fact, so that do what he would he could never forget her.

"Are you satisfied, Netta Wilding?" he asked, "that your evil wishes are working? You see how it is with me."

Netta walked on quietly. She was not, perhaps, a very high-minded little woman. She was not loving and impulsive, and her affection, even in the old days, for this man at her side had been but born of her insatiable vanity. It was her nature to care for those that gave good to her; to those that ministered to her desires.

And her desires were legion, but in the main sensible enough.

She wore a piquant gown of blue Liberty stuff of strange devices. There were upon it numberless queer shaped creatures, with weird eyes, which seemed to stare at and mock Sir Guy.

In his fuddled state of brain he bated the gown, but the woman within it he loved and craved for with a mad, sick craving that he had ceased combating with.

Her very carelessness, as she laughed lightly, and stooped now and again to pick some lowly flower, exasperated him to madness.

"Netta," he cried, sober enough now, "we love each other still. Let us leave everything, and be together always. Let us go to sunny Italy; let us leave that fiend in human shape that came between us to work out her own ill. By Jove! she'll do it quickly, and then so sure as I am a living man I will marry you, and you shall come back in triumph as the mistress of States Martin."

"Is divorce, then, so easy?" asked she, smiling up in his face with apparent innocence. "Are you sure?"

"As sure as that there is a Heaven above us."

Netta trembled, but not with love. She had waited for something like this. He was at her feet once again. She was mistress of the situation.

For a moment she could not speak for a wicked, triumphant joy, as she heard the quick, panting breath of the man she delighted to humble.

In her hand she carried a small hunting-crop of her husband's, with which, as chance had it, she had recently chastised a dog for some misbehaviour.

She caressed the thong with her dainty, nervous fingers, and smiled again as she sauntered along a shady path, her cool blue gown trailing behind on the soft turf.

In the midst of a flow of hot, passionate words she stopped, facing him.

"And you want my answer at once?" she asked.

He only thought the hard set of her lovely face was due to agitation. Men are but men.

"You are right," she said slowly. "I do

not love my husband, not as you mean. I do not love anybody, but I care for my name and my position. My answer to you is—"

And upward through the air came a swishing sound of thonged leather, which caught Sir Guy's face right across the centre with dreadful force, so that the blood gushed forth, and he yelled with agony.

Jabez Stubbs hearing the cry rushed forward, and Netta saw by his face that he had heard all. She had not noticed the high hedge of laurels. She smiled, saying with quivering breath,—

"That is my final answer to the biggest coward God ever made. Leave him alone," to her husband, "he will make for his own kennel."

She turned and left them, and whether Jabez helped the man who had plotted his dishonour off his grounds she never inquired.

Sir Guy will carry the marks of that answer to his dying day.

## CHAPTER XII.

STITCHING was the order of the days at Park Farm, and Annabel, in her loneliness, often wondered a little wearily how it would all get done in time.

Letters came to her with businesslike regularity from the distant land to which her lover had gone, and these were her only love fare, and very good fare she found them, for Robert Standing wrote always in good spirits. Apparently she would like the new, strange life out there. And from his vivid descriptions of the scenery, and the manners of the people, she grew to look forward to the complete change with a secret pleasure that was cheering enough in the depressing atmosphere of home disapprobation.

Mrs. Wilding was the only one who saw good in it, for she was of a much wider mind than most in this respect of place. When living at States Martin she had known of people going to and fro to France and Italy much as if it were only running up to London.

"It can't be such an awful journey, my dear," she would say consolingly, after some amazing speech of a wondering neighbour, "and I am sure it's a fine country, and I don't know how you will speak their gibberish—for gibberish it is by what I've heard of it at States Martin. It seems so fast that I could never catch a word, and all the maids, as called themselves French, was just as stuck up as you please. But they soon picked up English. I'll say that for them; but then we don't jabber at such a rate. That's where you'll find the difficulty. And as to the food they eat; it's just awful kickshaws, and they squeeze all the gravy out of meat before they roast it—for postage, as they call it, but of course you can cook your own food as you like it."

Mrs. Wilding rather enjoyed these exhaustive talks, wherein she could air her worldly knowledge, and she was pleased to say quietly to the homely callers, "That of course Annabel had learned French at boarding-school. They must not forget that, and that her husband had an interpreter."

She was very particular and fussy about the house-linen for the far-away home. She bought carefully of the best, and pulled her poor fingers sore in drawing threads, so that all the hems should be even.

"And mind," she cautioned, "you have your washing done at home, unless you want all this to be torn to shreds by beating upon stones by the river—for I've heard that much about the washing over there!"

The weeks passed on till the last one in April came, and any day Robert Standing might be expected.

Things under Mrs. Wilding's sway were in as complete a state of readiness as was possible under the circumstances; and when just about to sit down and fold her busy hands in

comparative peace she was hastily summoned to States Martin.

There she found everything in wild and utter confusion. Sir Guy was raving in *delirium tremens*, his face out and gashed fearfully—some said by one of the groomst at the hotel in Southampton, others said by a woman of low repute in that town.

And Lady Muriel was missing.

The house was full of her disordered guests, who one and all seemed to look to Mrs. Wilding to set things in some sort of order, because she had for so many years been housekeeper under the old and more respectable régime.

Poor woman, she was at her wit's end, and even Lady Muriel's own people would not countenance their daughter's sin and shame by coming to her help in the emergency.

As for the present housekeeper, she had been a tool of my lady's, and had evidently decamped with her.

For days Sir Guy lay between life and death, worse than a lunatic in his ravings, and Mrs. Wilding did her best, but could but hope he had not long to live.

But nature was strong within him, and presently he was able to issue stern orders that everything in and about the place should be straightened—that everything belonging to his shameless wife should be turned out or destroyed—that preparations for his own departure should be set on foot with the least delay possible.

So all the horses were sold—the house thoroughly dismantled—servants, save the very old and trusted ones, dismissed—and Sir Guy and his man departed on some quest of the master's, which was best known to himself.

"I'll be even with her here," he said, muttering, as he examined his pistols, and packed them carefully with his own hands. "She's my wife, and I don't overlook the insult. One of us shall die, and I don't much care which it is!"

For some days no letter had come to Park Farm, and Annabel grew restless. Could anything be the matter?

On the spare room bed was spread out the pretty dove coloured satin wedding dress, the white chip bonnet, with its pearly ribbons and orange flowers and the light-embroidered scarf which was the pink of fashion, and Netta's personal gift.

Everything was in readiness, for it was understood that the wedding was to be by special licence, and might take place any day on the bridegroom's arrival, for he may have but short time to stay.

Here, again, was another grievance for the homely people. No banns put up—how could Farmer Wilding countenance such doings? but they supposed the wedding would be legal enough. As for the waste of money and the unseemliness of it, well, the least said the better.

And yet all the village talked incessantly.

Another day and no letter. Now that all the active preparation was done, the very needlework completed, Annabel had too much leisure to think, and grew more and more anxious and depressed. Outwardly she was calm and composed, but inwardly she was heavy-hearted—more so than an expectant bride should be.

It was not that she doubted her lover, but her case was peculiar. He had been her lover for so short a time before he was called away. The parting had almost closely followed the betrothal, so that as a declared lover, Annabel Wilding scarcely knew Robert Standing.

Try to keep up her spirits how she would the slight disapprobation of the people about her—her father's silent protest, as it were—vexed and perplexed her.

She had walked over to Abbey Mill, and had spent the afternoon tending the wonderful baby, and was returning along the brick-paved court under the low windows of Park Farm when she heard excited voices.

"It cannot be—it would be unseemly

Robert Standing. Once for all, I can't give my word to it."

He was come. What was her father denying? What was uselessly? The girl tottered weakly, for she was nervous and unstrung.

Then she heard old Mr. Standing's voice in argument.

So he was here too. What did it all mean, and if her lover were there, why was he not speaking?

At the moment, and looking huffed and angry, Robert Standing issued from the doorway as if to cool himself from the heat of debate, not to say dispute, for he held his light hat in his hand, fanning it lightly to his flushed face.

"My darling girl—here at last!" he cried, rapturously. "None of them knew where you had gone—and the time has seemed so long to me—my darling, my pretty one, my wife—"

His raptures were cut short by feeling his darling, his pretty one, his wife, a dead weight in his arms.

For the first time in her life Annabel had fainted.

This further fostered the honest farmer, who was considerably upset already by the news that his prospective son-in-law had less than a week's holiday, all told, and that, to get back to his work as he had promised, the wedding must take place immediately, "on the morrow" the excited young man had said, "if possible."

He had waved the special license triumphantly before their eyes, and was proportionately startled to find resistance to his wishes in what he inwardly termed old-fashioned, stubborn prejudice.

By virtue of his profession, perhaps, he was used to driving things ahead and carrying all before him. He was checked now with a vengeance, and being so thoroughly surprised and helpless he was at a loss what to say next. He had told them by letter he considered all along; they had no right to be so taken aback. And then Annabel was out—nobody knew where. Everything was going wrong just when he had expected everything to be so right.

And coming away from them into the open air he found his love, his darling!

And she, to crown his chafing discomfort, had incontinently fainted in his arms.

## CHAPTER XIII. AND LAST.

"My noble father,  
I do perceive here a divided duty;  
To you I am bound for life and education;  
My life and education both do learn me  
How to respect you; you are the lord of duty,  
I am hitherto your daughter; but here's my  
husband;  
And so much duty as my mother showed  
To you—preferring you before her father,  
So much I challenge that I may profess  
Due to the Moor, my lord."

In the spirit of these words of Shakespeare Annabel Wilding gravely acted, when, after her fainting-fit, she had a long, happy talk with her lover, and found all her unspoken fears and hesitations die away under the charm of his presence. She made no silly affectations to worry and annoy him, neither was she disposed to tantalise him with maidenly coyness that would have been out of place situated as they were. He could not help things being as they were, or he would have been more considerate, so he said, and so she, loving him truly, fully believed.

Had she read Milton, she would have endorsed his words:—

"What thou biddest  
Unargued I obey; so Heaven ordains;  
Heaven is thy law; thou mine; to know no more  
Is woman's happiest knowledge, and her praise."

To see the girl's happy face went a long way to cheer the ruffled spirit of the honest farmer.

After all, the lad was not his own master; and, hang it all, he was right in saying he had not deceived them! They had, come to that, been prepared for this very haste all along, scarcely for such rapid haste; still, common sense was common sense, and business was business.

No sooner did the farmer's mind veer to this point than he became Robert's ardent advocate, and put to silence all Mrs. Wilding's grumbling complaints about minor matters, such as invitations to the breakfast, the cooking of the same, and the arrangements for the going and returning to the church.

"After all," he said jollily, "the license is the principal thing next to the husband himself, and that's here all right, and Robert hasn't let the grass grow under his feet about the carriages. They are all ordered at Southampton, and only wait to know which day they are wanted. The wedding gown is ready—oh, my lass!—so what in Heaven's name are we making so much bother and fuss about?"

"Well, it can't be to-morrow, that's quite settled," said Mrs. Wilding. "That I cannot do; we must let all the people know. We can't make enemies for life of all our oldest and best friends."

And so that same night willing messengers were dispatched with notes in all directions, bidding the appointed guests for the next day but one; and not one hour of sleep did Mrs. Wilding or Molly or Sara permit themselves, that sundry and delicate culinary matters should not disgrace them upon the wedding-day.

"It's come to something," said the fully appeased father, "to have the kitchen fire going all night and two coppers fizzing fit to burst themselves. Why not order all the hickshaws from Southampton, mother? You'll wear yourself to fiddlesprings, you will."

"Plenty of time to rest afterwards," snapped Mrs. Wilding. "As it is, plenty that we should have made much better ourselves has to come from the pastrycooks; but if people are all laid up with bilious attacks afterwards at least it won't be my fault."

As for the lovers, they had a blissful time wandering about the near fields and gardens. There was nothing, Mrs. Wilding declared over and over again, that Annabel could do.

That lady slaved her hardest, for she was not to be outdone by fate, which had tried its best to serve her a soury trick. She would get all they could do in spite of it. It should not be said that she had lived for half her years at States Martin for nothing. She knew how things should be, and within her heart was a burning desire to outwile Mrs. Tom Wilding.

Netta's wedding had, Mrs. John considered, been very poorly managed, and folks she knew could hardly be expected to judge by time given, but by the effect produced.

She was fond of Annabel, and intended, so far as her powers went, to do the girl justice. She was making a good marriage, if it was in some respects rather an unusual one. So far so good, as it gave more *décor* to the whole affair.

"How is it, Robert," even yet the name came haltingly from the loving lips, "that you walk a little lame? I have been waiting for you to tell me."

It was the evening before the eventful day, and the lovers were strolling hand in hand through the secluded upper gardens of Park Farm.

The young fellow laughed heartily.

"And so your quick eyes have noticed my infirmity. I hoped to pass muster without its being discovered."

"You have had an accident—"

"Scarcely; you might with more nearness to truth say I had escaped one. The chances were, young woman, four days ago that no husband was forthcoming for you. Are you not eminently thankful that you have not to wear the green willow, but can to-morrow deck yourself out in the mystic orange blossoms instead? How entrancing you will look, my pet!"

"But, Robert, you have not told me about the accident."

He laughed again.

"It was a capital joke. Just as, after an infernally hard push for it, I reached the river, I found the beastly little boat that plies to catch the packet at Calais—you see our new railways will stop all that—was just on the point of starting, and the captain and the sailors did not seem inclined to wait for me, so I took my valise and hat-box and chuckd them on board, and as the last rope was shipped or drawn, or whatever in their jargon they call it, I sprang from the quay right on to the paddle box. There was a about of horror and then a clapping of hands and hurrahing. I had barked my shins a bit, but I was there, and now, for all their mulish incivility, I am here, and although a bit lame, able to tell the tale."

"But oh, Robert, dear!" this for the very first time in her life, "you might have been killed!"

"It would have been a little awkward, no doubt, if I had missed my jump; but I'm a pretty fair judge of distances, and getting on that boat meant England and you, my dear. It was neck or nothing, you see, and I hope you will excuse my slight lameness. It might have been worse, you see! More wedding presents!" he laughed, seeing Mrs. Wilding gesticulating at the lower gate for them to come in. "Really the people are very generous to you, Mrs. Standing, in spite of their disapprobation of me. By-the-bye, I may as well deal out my presents, eh, as the ceremony is so early to-morrow. I've got some pearls for you, pet, besides the wedding-ring, and I've got a magnificent affair in the brooch line for Mrs. Wilding, and I've got some stunning bead necklaces for Molly and Sara."

"Oh, Robert, mother will never let them wear them!"

He looked rather taken aback at this, but summed it up by declaring "all they had to do was to get married themselves, and then they could do what they liked, and wear what they liked."

At nine o'clock the next morning three wedding carriages, all with white horses and huge favours, stood in imposing array at the stackyard-gate, for no further could any vehicle approach to the doors of Park Farm.

It was all the better for the crowd of on-lookers, since the bridal procession had to walk right down through the grassy paths with their box edges.

"The roads should blossom, the roads should bloom,

So fair a bride shall leave her home!

Should blossom and bloom with garlands gay,

So fair a bride shall pass to-day."

It was a clear, lambent day, with the sort of breezy air blowing that is especially calculated to put vexed minds into good humour with themselves and their surroundings.

Hence all the guests were jovial, and the wedding party itself was gay to a fault. The farmer was pleased and delighted to see how the village had outdone itself in decorations.

There was even a rough triumphal arch, which had once done duty when a royal marriage had taken place. Now it was a mass of May-bloom and lilac, which scented the air, and formed a pretty background to the levered device, "May they be happy!"

The old lych gate was covered with ferns and bluebells, and the school children mustered in force and struck up a bridal processional hymn as they strewed their floral trophies for the bride to walk on.

All this showed in certain contradistinction to the quietness of Netta's wedding, and flattered Mrs. Wilding, because she had desired much for her favourite. As she said, confidentially to an especial friend and croomy, "the Stubbs", although rich, were not popular."

The bells rang out a gladsome peal. "And well they might," said old Jones, the sexton, "seeing as 'ow the bridegroom sent down a

five-poun' note the night afore. What bells wouldn't ring?"

Robert Standing looked on, pleased and content with his choice. The calm dignity of Annabel pleased him, for he was fastidious to a fault in the ways of womankind.

And now the dove-coloured satin was changed for the grey *tabinette*, with its cosy tippet and hood, in which the "wife" was to travel the first stage of her important journey.

"Ay, Rob, my son!" said old Mr. Standing, rubbing vigorously at his eyes with a curiously large spotted silk handkerchief, "over there in Frenchland maybe, they'll take you two for a man and a woman, but you're only just a couple of children when all's said and done."

Everybody kissed Annabel again and again, and Nettie broke down entirely under what was to her, perhaps, a trying ordeal.

Her husband was alarmed at the violence of her grief, and, manlike, feared a scene. Somehow, he thought just then of that day in sweet Atherley Woods, when he had found her in much the same condition.

And she had been a good wife to him, and his child would bear comparison with anybody's.

"Come, Nettie!" he said, with a tenderness in his voice she had never heard before; "don't go back to old times—'tis never any good—bear up, for all our sakes, or maybe folks 'll be thinking it queer."

Molly and Sara almost swallowed the bride in capacious embraces, and Robert Standing had an idea afterwards that he was likewise included, and that they both kissed him, but he was never quite sure on the point.

Once more goes the bridal procession through the tall hollyhocks.

"The roads should blossom and bloom to-day,  
So fair a bride shall leave her home!  
Should blossom and bloom with garlands gay,  
So fair a bride shall pass to-day."

They go hastily down to the open stackyard-gate, where stands the chariot with its grey, flower-decked horses. The bells clash out a furious peal. Into the carriage with them stepped the two respective fathers, who were to see them off at the docks.

The postboy cracked his whip, as I believe only these postboys of long ago can crack a whip. The horses gave a wild lurch forward in the loose straw-strewn yardway; but gaining the road they settled down to their work with a will, and dashed round the corner at a rattling pace, the easily hung chaise swinging as if in time to the peeling bells, which might well have been echoing:

"So fair a bride shall leave her home

So fair a bride shall pass to-day."

[THE END]

MR. EDISON, the electrician, who is at present the lion of Paris, is only forty-two years old. The record of America's "smartest" young man is naturally interesting. He began life as a newsboy. When he began his newsboy's career he was barely able to read. Yet, as a newsboy, his opportunities were considerable. The newspaper became his classic, and the railway platform, or open street, his university. After a time he began to read books on chemistry. He thought he would become a telegraph signaller, and he did. In course of time he started a shop at Michigan for the repair of telegraphic instruments. Next he tried his hand at invention, and he produced the automatic repeater. Then he began to grow famous. From that time his progress was so rapid that, in 1876, he found himself in a position to retire from professional work and devote himself entirely to research and discovery. Mr. Edison is the inventor of the carbon telephone, the phonograph, the aeroplane, the phonometer, the electric pen, and the quadruplex system of telegraphing.

## EDEN'S SACRIFICE.

(Continued from page 79.)

—10:—

### CHAPTER II.—(continued.)

"You need not be afraid to trust your name and honour to me, Bertie," she answered, gently.

His face flashed hotly. Some words were upon his lips, but he choked them back and forced himself to speak calmly.

"It is neither of my name nor honour that I was thinking," he replied, "but of you. Life contains so many rough places, Eden, that you know nothing of, and it requires a great love to bridge them securely. If I knew that it would ever come—if I felt that by serving patiently for years I might win that which I know you are capable of giving—I would be content."

"It is too late to reconsider now, Bertie." He shrank back as though she had struck him, and did not speak again until the clergyman had entered the room.

When the witnesses had taken their places she stood beside him and listened to the words that bound her life to his for ever.

Until it was all done, and the words "Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder" had been uttered, she seemed to be dazed, incapable of connected thought.

But as she raised her eyes to her husband's face a paralysing thought came to her:

"Who is he? May not he be an adventurer? I do not even know his name to be what he says. Great heavens! what have I done?"

The terrible fear came upon her so strongly that she staggered, and would have fallen, but that Staunton's quick arm caught and supported her.

"What is it?" he asked tenderly. "Are you ill?"

The sound of the unsonorous, aristocratic voice reassured her; the strong touch of the long, patrician fingers strengthened her.

She smiled vaguely. "A sudden giddiness," she answered. "It is over now."

Then she signed the name of Eden Carleton for the last time, and an Irish servant-woman, who had witnessed the ceremony, whispered to another.

"Carleton and Staunton. By the holy Virgin, it's a bad sign! Sure now they used to say 'a change of name and not of letter is a change for the worse and not the better.'"

The words reached Eden, and she shivered, ashamed of her superstition and weakness a moment afterwards.

Still that vague, shadowy presentiment would return again and again. She tried to fight it from her, but it came again with persistent force.

They were driven to a first-rate hotel, and given a handsome suite of rooms.

Left alone Staunton knelt by her side and clasped her waist with his arm.

"Eden," he said, almost tenderly, "you are my wife. Are you glad or sorry?"

With an impulse, as much compassion as love, she leaned towards him and pressed her lips to his.

It was the first voluntary caress she had given him, and his expression of mad delight touched her.

"I am afraid I have been thoughtless of your happiness, Bertie; but it will be different after awhile. You have been very good, and I ungrateful; but, oh, Bertie! I have been so hurt, so bitterly wounded, because of his deception."

She threw her arms about his neck, laid her head upon his bosom, and wept like a child.

Tenderly, caressingly, Staunton soothed her, and gradually beguiled her to think and talk of other things.

He tried to put his heart into the effort, but

a coldness was upon him that startled himself. He loved her wildly, insanely, but there was a something that arose like a spectre between them. Was it fear?

"You are tired," he said at last. "You look more beautiful in your fatigues than in your buoyant health, my Eden. You are perfect alike in form, feature and name. You would never allow me to compliment you before; but I can now, because you are mine; fancy that, Eden—mine! I love the very sound of your quaint name, my darling!"

"I love it, too, because it was my mother's. You have never told me your mother's name, Bertie. What was it?"

He arose suddenly from his knees beside her and walked to the other end of the room. His voice had a curious suppressed sound when he answered,—

"Her name was Inez, but I never knew her."

"She is dead, then?"

"Yes."

"And your father?"

"He is—dead also!"

Great drops of perspiration stood upon the man's brow. His eyes were agonised.

Eden went up to him, and lifting her beautiful arms placed them about his neck.

"I did not know," she said, gently. "Forgive me. I have been selfishly thoughtless; but I am glad to be your wife, Bertie, because I love you."

"You—love me, Eden?"

His voice was hoarse with a passion that half-an-hour before she could not have understood.

"With all my heart," she answered, unsteadily.

"I can scarcely believe it!" he cried, catching her closer to him. "Oh, my wife, my darling, it—"

"Hush!" she whispered. "I want to feel your love while you do not speak. I want your heart to tell mine of your truth and your nobility. Listen, Bertie, and forgive me. For one moment I was mad enough to doubt you—to wonder if you are what you seem. I think the very insanity of the doubt showed me how I love you."

He crushed her to him that she might not see his face, and the language of his soul was,—

"She shall not know! She shall not! Heaven help me! How can I preserve the secret that must be kept now?"

### CHAPTER III.

VERY nearly a week had passed—a week of happiness to Mrs. Bertram Staunton, who, in her own joy, had partially forgiven her brother his fault—a week of delicious content to the young husband, who lived in the present, banishing fear for the future as one shuts his eyes to the breakers ahead and waits, not knowing but that some fate will deliver him from death.

How devoted, how tender, how true he was! He watched over her with the love of a mother guarding her first-born.

He hung upon her words; he lived upon her caresses; he shivered with dread if she left him but a moment.

And she?

He grew in that week to be the nucleus of her existence.

She told him a thousand times a day that she wondered how she had ever lived without him.

And as he watched her love growing hour by hour, he became, instead of more confident, believing that her love could endure any test, morbidly afraid of any blow to it.

To a looker-on, watching the scene understandingly, it was intensely pathetic.

His very soul hung upon his ability to keep his secret, while Eden saw nothing but the love she had won.

Its vast depth and breath never startled her; it was too delicately, too tenderly shown.

She would have trusted him with her life, as she had trusted him with her heart.

When she remembered her silly fears upon her wedding-night she did so with shame, and she was doubly tender to him afterwards.

But the blow fell all too soon—the crushing slaughter of a life.

They were walking through the hall of the hotel one day, arm-in-arm, like two merry children, when Eden saw coming towards her a man and woman, the man familiar of form and face.

After a second glance she broke away from her husband, and rushing forward, pitched herself upon his breast.

"Oh! Malcolm!" she cried. "How glad—how very glad I am!"

"Eden! and here!" he gasped. "My dear, I don't understand."

"Of course you don't. I've been a silly girl, but I'm a very happy one. You took your life into your own hands, and I followed your example. This is my sister, I am sure" (kissing her affectionately). "Malcolm is so surprised that he won't introduce us, but we shan't mind that, shall we? Malcolm, let me introduce my husband, Mr. Staunton. Mrs. Carleton, Mr. Staunton."

If Eden had been preparing a sensation for weeks she could have planned nothing better.

Malcolm, believing his sister to be safely at Oak Vale, was confounded, but Bertie Staunton saw nothing of that. He touched his brother-in-law's hand, as courtesy demanded, but his eyes were fixed with burning horror upon the beautiful *debonair* blonde face beside him, and she was regarding him with what might be called interested impertinence.

Her cool eyes were fixed upon him with disdainful calm, while the fire in his glowed brilliantly for a moment, then went out.

But Eden had seen.

She was startled, but held her peace, inviting her brother and his wife to her rooms.

"Will you explain this most extraordinary situation to me?" Malcolm asked.

She complied, and they had their mutual words of forgiveness and congratulation.

Then Carleton looked at his watch.

"I am late already for an appointment," he said, rising. "Shall we dine together at six?"

"With pleasure," Staunton answered.

Then kissing his sister and wife, and shaking hands with Bertie, Malcolm went.

"I must leave you also," Bertie Carleton exclaimed, rising indolently when he had gone. "I am a slave to an afternoon nap. Until dinner then, Eden, *au revoir*! I am quite sure we shall become great friends, Mr. Staunton!"

She bowed ever so slightly, her beautiful gold hair glittering in the sunlight.

"You must call my husband Bertie," laughed Eden. "It sounds so absurd and formal of you to say Mr. Staunton."

"Then, if I may"—with a curious smile upon her crimson lips—"Bertie. It has rather a familiar sound."

She smiled mockingly, and left them.

For a moment Eden stood looking at the closed door through which she had disappeared, then turned, with a little frown to her husband.

"What do you think of her, Bertie?" she asked.

"She is beautiful," he answered, constrainedly.

"Do you know I fancied that you and she had met before. Have you?"

A brief pause; then:

"No!"

For the first time she doubted his word.

He leant over and kissed her.

"I am going out upon business for half-an-hour, dear," he said. "Shall you be lonely?"

"I shall have my memory of you," she answered.

He took her in his arms and kissed her with a passion that he had never equalled before.

"My pure one—my wife!" he murmured, and left her.

A sense of oppression was upon her, a heaviness that weighted her like some frightful incubus. She went into her bed-chamber and threw herself upon a couch. She was vaguely disappointed, overshadowed by a coming fatality.

The couch upon which she had thrown herself was pushed against a door leading to another suite of rooms, and scarcely had her head touched the pillow than she became conscious of hearing the tones of her husband's voice in the adjoining room.

She started up involuntarily, and, without thought of wrong, listened.

"I have come to you for an explanation of your presence here as Malcolm Carleton's wife!"

That was what he said, and Eden's lips grew white; her hands clasped themselves upon her chest convulsively, her breath came in quivering, jagged gasps as she waited for the answer.

It came after a little rippling, scornful, mocking laugh, which Eden recognised as belonging to her brother's wife.

"I thought you would come," Bertie replied, in a cool voice. "You see I waited for you. I have power even to draw you from your new toy, Bertie."

"Silence!" he commanded, sternly. "Don't dare allow your foul lips to breathe a thought of so pure a thing as my wife!"

"Your what?"

"My wife!" firmly.

Again that scornful laugh rang out, turning Eden's blood to ice.

"We will drop that subject, if you please," continued Staunton, coldly. "I have come to ask you if Malcolm Carleton knows your private history?"

"My dear Bertie, how absurd you are! Of course he don't. Do you suppose that little pale-haired aristocrat would have married me had he known?"

"Most decidedly I do not, and for that reason I am here. You must tell him."

"Are you mad? Do you think that I would give up the life of respectability, not to speak of affluence, that opens before me, for a whim of yours? How little you know me after all, Bertie!"

"But I tell you that Malcolm Carleton must know from either you or me."

"Do you mean to threaten?"

"A man of honour never threatens. I simply warn you."

"You have become very virtuous within the past three weeks," she sneered. "Let me ask you—have you told my handsome sister-in-law that your mother was the notorious Inez Rawlins, whose beautiful face adorns the rogue's gallery, and whose history is a disgrace to humanity? Have you told her that you have no knowledge of who your father was? Have you—"

"One word more, and I shall forget that you are a woman and strangle you!" cried Staunton, hoarsely, his eyes ablaze with rage. "I forbid you ever to speak one word of that to my wife or her brother. You shall not pollute her purity with the knowledge of that villainess, nor by an association with a woman such as you. The world knows you. You cannot conceal your shame even if I were to remain silent, which I shall not do."

Bertie Carleton straightened herself, and looked into the antagonistic eyes defiantly.

"I remember you well, Bertie, as the firmest man I ever knew," she said slowly. "Perhaps that was why I loved you so insanely in those dear old wicked days that you seem to have forgotten."

"Listen to me, Bertie. I love you as well now as I did then, even though you have abandoned me. I am going to put two alternatives before you, and if you will think, you will remember that I can be even more obstinate than you. You wish me to leave Malcolm Carleton. Very well: I will go, and never see him again, upon one condition. It is that

you go with me. Another opportunity that I offer you is silence for silence.

"There is no reason why you should rob me of the position I have won if you do not want me for yourself."

"In the event of your refusing both of these, there is another open to you. It is this: Do you forget Bertie Staunton, that I, and not that baby whom I met to-day, am your wife, and that by your second marriage you have committed bigamy? If you take respectability and wealth from me, and if you decline to give me the protection of your love in exchange—well, as well the penitentiary as anything else. You understand me now, I hope? Do what you threaten, and I shall have you arrested and imprisoned for bigamy within twenty-four hours."

"That I shall suffer with you will be a consolation to me, rather than anything to deter. You see I am neither excited nor angry. I simply mean what I say. I shall be grateful for your answer."

If Eden had but waited to hear it, this history of suffering might never have been written; but she did not.

In a wild excess of anguish she leaped to her feet and fled—fled as far as she could from the sound of the voices.

Then, crouching upon the floor, she remained there, like some dumb animal striving to hide from a pursuing misery.

The words that Bertie Staunton spoke were uttered firmly.

"I have listened to you," he said, slowly, "in order to answer any of your mistakes that I so well remember you are liable to make. I do not even speak to you bitterly, Bertie, because I despise you too thoroughly."

"There was a time, in my innocent youth, when, deceived by your infernal artifices, I believed I loved you, and, like an honourable man, I asked you to be my wife. We went through with a mockery of a marriage, after which I learned your character all too soon. You did not care to conceal your baseness, your treachery, your love of gold then."

"I grew to hate you, to know that my feeling for you at best had never been anything more than the infatuation of a boy, and I loathed myself for my own insanity. Then one day the knowledge came to me of your former marriage to Rupert Howard. Ah, you start!"

"He is dead!" hoarsely.

"Oh, no! He lives, and you know it. You were never divorced from him, and consequently I was never married to you at all by anyone in the universe."

"Eden Carleton is my wife—the only one I have ever had. That in my boyish days I should have been duped by an adventuress, and that I should have failed to tell my wife of that unhappy episode, are my only faults. Whatever my parents may have been I am innocent, thank Heaven!—and neither you nor any other living being can say to the contrary."

"You see I have nothing whatever to fear from you, and I warn you now that I shall tell Malcolm Carleton your history to night, if you have not forestalled me. That is all. Good afternoon!"

He bowed with profound ceremony, and left the room.

(To be continued.)

ONE of the oldest engineering projects in the world is now gradually approaching completion, and the work will probably be finished during the present year. This is the canal through the Isthmus of Corinth, in Greece. Work was actually begun on the canal under the Emperor Nero, so that over seventeen hundred years will have passed between its beginning and its final completion. As finally excavated, the canal will be four miles long, with a depth of eight metres, or sufficient for the largest vessels which usually navigate the adjacent seas.

## FACETIE.

YOUNG MAN: "Does your sister play the piano, Bobby?" Bobby: "Play it! No; but she works it about seven hours a day."

"Tnx reading my mind," said a shallow-pated, self-conceited young man to a mind-reader. "Excuse me," replied the latter, "I haven't a microscope with me."

Mrs. GRUBB: "Have you any more sugar like the last ye sent me?" GRUBB (stirring): "Yes, madam, plenty of it. How much do you want?" Mrs. Grubb: "Don't want none."

"WHAT prompted you to rob this man's till?" asked the judge of the prisoner. "My family physician," was the answer. "He told me it was absolutely necessary that I should have a little change."

"WHAT a beautiful new boat!" exclaimed Miss Ethel, at Long Branch, as the yacht *Psyche* shot past the wharf. "Yes," replied her uncle from St. Louis; "but isn't that a funny way to spell fish?"

The Captain (to Jack Hardup): "There's the great heiress, Miss Moneybags. Go and propose." Jack Hardup: "But she doesn't know me yet." The Captain: "Don't you see, dear boy, that's your only chance."

LADY VICTORIA: "I'm going now, Tommy; wouldn't you like to walk home with me?" Tommy: "No, I'm afraid I couldn't keep up." "Couldn't keep up! Why, child?" "Cause I hear folks say you're rather fast."

"AREN'T you ashamed to be seen fighting with that brutal Jenkins boy on the street?" asked Johnnie's irate mother. "Ashamed?" repeated Johnnie in surprise. "Ashamed? No, why should I be? I licked him."

THOMAS one would wish to have expressed differently:—Nervous Invalid: "Ah, my dear fellow, this is one of the worst attacks I ever had!" Sympathetic Friend: "Yes, old man; I sincerely hope it will be the last! Good-bye."

"No, GEORGE," she muttered, as the miserable youth knelt in a passionate frenzy at her feet, "I can never be yours." "Well, Clara," he answered bitterly, as he rose quickly, "you might at least have told me to before, and saved me from bagging these trousers."

WOULD-BE CUSTOMER: "Yes, I would like to marry, and if you come across a handsome, young, amiable girl who has money and who wants a good home, just drop me a postal." Marriage broker: "I beg your pardon, but if I find that kind of a female I'm going to marry her myself."

"How many letter d's are there in the Welsh alphabet, William?" asked his wife. "Why, only one, of course." "Oh, you must be mistaken. Here's a Welsh paper, and nearly every word contains four or five d's. There must be two or three dozen in their alphabet, at least."

"Has my husband been in here?" inquired a woman of the barman. "He's a tall, red complexioned man, and wears a slouch hat." "A man answering that description got a half-pint bottle of whisky about ten minutes ago." "How big a bottle?" "Half-pint." "Some other man," said the woman.

ARTHUR SUMMERTON (as the engagement is broken): "And this, then, is the end of all?" Miss Willoughby: "O no; only the end of summer." Arthur Summerton: "You are flippant; that is clear." Miss Willoughby: "Ah? Then why did you take me seriously when I promised to marry you?"

"Mrs. DUMPSY: "For shame, Willie! You've been fighting again. Your clothes are torn and your face is scratched. Dear me, what a trial you are! I wish you were a girl—girls don't fight." Willie Dumpsy: "Yes; but me, don't you think it's better to have a good, square fight and get all the mad out of you than to carry it around, the way the girls do, for months?"

"MR. M'CLINTOCK," shouted his better half, "I want you to take your feet off the parlour table." "Mrs. M'Clintock," he said, in a fixed, determined voice, "I allow only one person to talk to me that way." "And who is that?" she demanded. "You, my dear," he replied, softly, as he removed his paces.

JONES: "There are only two periods in a man's life when he is greatly interested in his personal appearance." SMITH: "When do they occur?" JONES: "One is at twenty, when he watches the hair coming out of his upper lip; and the other is at forty, when he watches the hair coming out on the top of his head."

HE (a travelling man): "I have but five minutes. Say, will you be my wife? I must catch that train." She (never utters a word). He: "Only three minutes left; say the word, my darling." She (silent as the grave). He: "One minute left! Promise to be my wife!" She: "I promise." He: "I'll take the next train."

THE correspondent who wants to know "how to cook cabbage without having an odour in the house," is informed in the absence of the expert who conducts our household department, that another good way is to boil the cabbage in the middle of a ten acre lot, and keep the doors and windows of the house tightly closed while it is cooking.

MR. NICEFELLOW (so adored one's little brother): "There! You did that errand very nicely. Here's a penny for you." Little Brother: "Oh, ma! Mr. Nicefellow gave me a penny." Ma: "Well, my dear you should say—." Little Brother: "Yes, I know, I should say 'thank you,' but I was so surprised I forgot. You said he hadn't a cent."

THOMSON, you're a very mean man." "Thank you, Dolliver. How so?" I asked you to lend me an umbrella during the rain yesterday." "I remember." "And you said your umbrella was used up." "Well?" "To-day I saw you with an elegant umbrella." "What of it?" "You said it was used up." "So it is. I always use it up. Don't suppose I'd use it down do you?"

Mrs. MUSHROOM: "Them's very pretty dishes you've got, Mrs. Linage." Mrs. Linage: "Yes, those are some specimens of our family china. They have been in our family for generations. You see, each piece bears our family crest." "That's pretty fine, ain't it? But wait till you see the family china I've ordered. I'm going to have a different family crest on each plate."

ONE of our Sunday school-teachers, on a recent occasion, told her pupils that when they put their pennies in the contribution box she wanted each one to repeat an appropriate Bible verse. The first boy dropped in a penny, saying: "The Lord loveth a cheerful giver." The next boy dropped his money into the box, saying: "He that giveth to the poor lendeth to the Lord." The third and youngest dropped his penny, saying: "A fool and his money are soon parted."

TRAMP (with an old school-book): "Say, mister, will yer kindly tell me what letter this is?" Pedestrian: "Certainly. That's a L. Can't you read?" "No, sir; but I'm tryin' ter learn, an' I sha'n't rest till I do, nuther." "I am delighted to find so laudable an ambition in one of your class. You have taken the right course at last." "Yes, sir. It's mighty rough on a traveller like me not ter be able to tell whether a sign says 'Beware of the Dog' or 'Free Lunch Opening.'"

ONE day Professor W—, examining the mental philosophy class, said: "Ah, young gentlemen, I have an impression! Now, young gentlemen," continued the doctor, as he touched his head with his forefinger, "can you tell me what an impression is?" No answer. "What? No one knows? No one can tell what an impression is?" exclaimed the doctor, looking up and down the class. "I know," said a certain brilliant youth. "An impression is a dent in a soft place."

A SHREWD Boston dentist, with more work than he could attend to, received a call from a lady patron, who wanted a set of teeth made in a hurry. Seizing a sharp instrument, he very coolly thrust it into the roof of his patient's mouth. "Does that hurt you, madam?" asked the dentist. Of course it hurt, and of course madam said so. "Then your mouth is quite too sensitive for the work just at present. You must call in about a week or ten days, when your mouth will be in better condition." He made those teeth, and in his own good time.

OLD GENT (evidently under great mental strain): "See here, sir; I want to speak to you, sir. You were at my house until very late last night, and after my daughter went to her room I heard her sobbing for an hour. You're a villain, sir, and I've a great mind—" YOUNG MAN: "Sobbing?" O. G.: "Yes, sir. How dared you to insult—" Y. M.: "I wouldn't think of such a thing. Believe me," O. G.: (temperamentally): "What did you say to her, sir?" Y. M.: "I merely remarked that I was too poor to marry."

"BUN," said a stranger to a footblack on Larned street, "didn't you black my shoes yesterday?" "I guess I did." "Right over in that doorway?" "Oh, yes." "Well, when I paid you didn't I give you five five-dollar gold pieces in mistake for pennies?" "Not much you didn't." "Be honest, now." "I am honest. D'y'e suppose that if I got my hands on twenty-five dollars I'd be here now? Not much! I'd be fighting for the plains on a palace car, with a revolver on each hip and a lasso over my right shoulder, and by to-morrow you'd see in the papers that I'd run across old Sitting Bull and made him so tired that anybody could pull his nose. Made a mistake! You bet you didn't!"

"WHAT did Hannibal do after the battle of Cannæ?" asked a German-school teacher of his pupils. First Pupil: "He pursued the Romans with great vigor." Teacher: "Wrong! Next!" Second Pupil: "He encamped on the battle ground." Teacher: "Next?" Third Pupil: "He retreated to his former position." Teacher: "You are all wrong. Ain't you ashamed of yourselves that none of you know the correct answer to such a simple question? I say, you bay at the foot of the class, what did Hannibal do after the battle of Cannæ?" Last Boy: "I don't know." Teacher: "Corroos, my boy, you have studied your lesson properly. Go up to the head of the class. You don't know, and nobody else knows what Hannibal did after the battle of Cannæ."

A FARMER had some wheat stolen a few nights since, and he was so sure that he knew who the thief was that he came into town and secured a warrant for a certain young man living near him. When the case came up for trial the defendant said he could prove an alibi. In order to do this he had brought in "his girl"—a buxom lass of 25. She took the stand and swore that he sat up with her from seven in the evening until broad daylight next morning. "People can be very easily mistaken," observed the plaintiff's lawyer. "I don't care—I know he was there," she replied. "What did you talk about?" "Love," she promptly answered. "What time did the old folks go to bed?" "I gave 'em the wink about ten." "Sure he was there at midnight, are you?" "Yes, sir." "Why are you sure?" She blushed, looked over to her lover and laughed, and getting a nod to go ahead, she said: "Well, sir, just as the clock struck twelve the old man jumped out of bed upstairs and hollered down, 'Sarah, yer mar wants some o' that outip wa,' and we got such a start we broke the back of the rocking chair and went over backward kerplunk!" "Then the jury must understand that you were seated on Samuel's knee?" "I ob'ct!" put in Samuel's lawyer, and his honour remembered the days of his youth and sustained the objection.

## SOCIETY.

COLOURED glass for table ware is much in vogue.

MR. EDISON smokes a great deal; the more work he does, the more cigars he consumes.

OUVA carries out the conventional idea of the blue-stocking, inasmuch as she is pronounced the worst-dressed woman in Europe.

THE cars of the new imperial train for the Emperor of Russia are lined with cork.

LORD TENNYSON asserts that his coming volume of poems will be his absolutely farewell contribution to literature.

PRINCESS BEATRICE has made the beautiful Isle of Wight late fashionable in England, and has even the Sunday dresses of her babies made of it.

"FRIGHTENED mouse colour" is the latest fashionable shade. It is probably a little paler than the ordinary mouse colour.

THE most disquieting rumours are being circulated in the West-end clubs concerning the health of the Prince of Wales.

It is said that a prominent member of Parliament intends bringing in a bill next session to restrain improvident marriages.

SWALLOWS, said to be birds of good luck, are now playing an important part in the decoration of the newest fashionable stationery.

ONE of the charities in which Princess Christian especially interests herself is the St. Andrew's Society for helping poor ladies. This excellent undertaking does an immensity for the assistance of gentlemen destitute of proper means of support, and is deserving of general aid.

THE much commended example of the Princess of Wales in bringing up her daughters in severe simplicity proved a little too rigid in the case of the present Duchess of Fife. Since her marriage she has surprised those who considered her an ungainly girl by blossoming into a grace and attractiveness that no one suspected she possessed while she was under the stern parental rule.

LEATHER and kid sound like very queer trimmings, yet both may be observed among the novelties, sometimes embroidered with fine gold or steel beads. It is just as though some fancy shoemaker had stopped making shoes, and put all his material in the piece on the market.

THE reason why the Queen cannot accept the invitation to Dublin is not through any feeling of pique or of doubt. It is simply that the excitement, formality, and fuss inevitably attaching to any such visit would be a most unwise tax upon Her Majesty's health.

THERE is at present living in Cheltenham, in her ninety-second year, a granddaughter of the Rev. Dr. Shaw, of Croyton, N.B., who carried despatches from Brodie of Brodie at the battle of Culloden, through the camp of the Pretender, to the Duke of Cumberland. The lady in question is Anna Wilhelmina Shaw; she was born in March 1798, and although in her ninety-second year, she is as bright and lively as if she were thirty years younger.

THE Imperial party at Fredensborg is now broken up. It consisted of an Emperor and empress, three Kings, two queens, four heirs-apparent to thrones, and a host of princes and princesses.

THE Sultan really has but one wife—the rest are "favourites;" but these young ladies lead lives which are fairly useful, and get through an amount of work each day that would astonish many a British girl. There is no lounging about on divans, or intricate and time-killing bathing; or lengthy siestas, or the hours spent in listening to modernised *Contes de Balzac*. On the contrary, the girls of high birth who are enrolled among the favourites have to work pretty hard in return for their privileges.

IN spite of all said to the contrary, the young King of Serbia is most anxious to see his mother, and will in no way be pacified, constantly asking for her. The day of his coronation he refused to allow the regal crown to be placed upon his head until the Regents had promised to restore her.

## STATISTICS.

MACHINERY in the United States does the work of 500,000,000 men.

IF Her Majesty called all the policemen of England, with their officers, to a review, an army of nearly 40,000 men would pass before her. The precise number is 37,296. Of simple constables there are 30,000, of detective officers, 611; there are 3,890 sergeants, 1,543 inspectors, 530 superintendents, and 167 borough head-constables.

LONDON has eighty-one hospitals and fifty dispensaries supported by voluntary contributions. Last year one million, thirty-eight thousand outside patients were treated at the dispensaries and out-service department of the hospitals. One in every four of the inhabitants of London receives gratuitous medical treatment when ill.

AN average of five feet of water is estimated to fall annually over the whole earth, and, assuming that condensation takes place at an average height of 3,000 feet, scientists conclude that the force of evaporation to supply such rainfall must equal the lifting of 322,000,000 pounds of water 3,000 feet in every minute, or about 300,000,000,000 horse-power constantly exerted.

## GEMS.

It is the greatest possible praise to be praised by a man who is himself deserving of praise.

It is worth a thousand pounds a year to have the habit of looking on the bright side of things.

THERE is no greater fool than he who thinks himself wise; no one wiser than he who suspects he is a fool.

WE are born at home, we live at home, and we must die at home; so that the comforts and economies of home are of more deep, heartfelt, and personal interest to us than the public affairs of all the nations in the world.

A BLESSING beyond wealth, beyond beauty, or even beyond talent, is that cheerful temperament which can rejoice in the sunshine, yet be merry in the shade—which can delight in the singing of the birds in spring, yet solace itself with the heart's own music when winter is at hand.

## HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

PRESERVED SIBERIAN CRABS.—Make a rich syrup and boil the crabs whole in it until the skin cracks open, when they are sufficiently done. When put away for use put a little orange peel and two or three cloves in the syrup to give it a good flavour. Wet a paper in brandy, and put over the top.

SPONGE CAKES.—Take eight eggs and divide the yolks and the whites. To the yolks add the finely-chopped rind of a lemon, and then work them with a wooden spoon for about twelve minutes, then add twelve ounces of castor sugar and continue to work the yolks and sugar for ten to twelve minutes more. Whip the whites of the eggs until they are quite stiff, and then add them by degrees, together with eight ounces of fine flour, which has previously been rubbed through a sieve and afterwards warmed. In adding the flour and egg you must add about a teaspoonful of flour and a little of the white of the egg at a time, stirring the mixture lightly and carefully all the time. The mould for baking the sponge cakes in should be prepared before you begin to mix the cakes in the following way:—Brush them over lightly with warm butter, and then mask them with castor sugar and flour in equal quantities. In small moulds fifteen minutes in a cool oven will be sufficient time to bake the cakes, and the full quantity would take about an hour and a half. It is advisable, after the cake has been in the oven about half an hour, to stand it in a tin containing some salt, to prevent the cake becoming too brown at the bottom.

## MISCELLANEOUS.

THE Pope has a full set of pearly white teeth well preserved.

EVERY Swedish girl not born to wealth is taught a trade of some kind.

SOME writing 4,280 years old is on exhibition in Paris, and the ink looks as fresh as on a newly written note.

LONG purses of silver wire net work, with a ring in the centre, made after the style of old-time silk knitted ones, are a feature among purses.

THE artistic arrangement of natural flowers is part of every Japanese lady's education—a much more satisfactory accomplishment than the manufacture of floral monstrosities in wax.

EVERY telephone company in Russia has to submit a list of its subscribers to the police. It has also to make such arrangements that any conversation can be overheard by the police if desired.

A MUMMY, on which were inscriptions that are said to have proved it to have been one of the Pharaohs, was unwound in Egypt recently, and experts have decided that he was in life afflicted with gout.

It is said that a mustard plaster on the elbow will relieve neuralgia in the face, and one on the back of the neck will relieve neuralgia in the head; and that many persons have been cured by this simple process.

PEOPLE born during spring have in general stronger constitutions than those born during the other three seasons. Births and deaths happen more frequently during night than day time, and it may also be added that it is only a quarter of the male population who attain the prescribed age for carrying arms.

A NEW candle has been brought out which extinguishes itself in an hour. This it does by means of a tiny extinguisher of tin, which is fastened in the wax by wires, and which effectually performs its task. It is only necessary to remove this diminutive extinguisher when its work is done, and the candle is again ready to burn another hour.

WEIMAR, that delightful little town in Germany, has just set an example which every English city, town, and village should hasten to follow. The municipal authorities have issued an edict which strictly forbids any resident to play a piano with the window open, or "to the annoyance and discomfort of neighbours and others." Happy, happy Weimar!

THE largest piece of gold in the world was taken from Byer and Haltman's gold mining claim, Hill End, New South Wales, May 10, 1872. Its weight was 640 pounds, height, 4 feet 9 inches, width 3 feet 2 inches, average thickness, 4 inches; worth 148,000 dollars. It was found embedded in a thick wall of blue slate, at a depth of 250 feet from the surface. The owners of the mine were living on charity when they found it.

ABOUT an hour, or, perhaps, not more than half-an-hour, before the familiar cry of the milkman was heard in the empty streets on a recent morning, an event was taking place in the heavens which had not occurred for six thousand years! The planets Mars and Saturn were in closer conjunction than they have been for that period; long enough in all conscience, if compared with the span of man's little life.

It is quite necessary to warn some ladies, who, perhaps not unknowingly, are inflicting severe torture on their male companions. A device which it is said owes its existence to the levelling up of fashion, or it may be to the spleen of a jealous woman, consists in having leaden blocks placed at the bottom of the panels of her dress. Then, when during a promenade, the lady fancies her spouse's eyes are wandering, the attention of her liege lord becomes arrested by a scraping sensation on the shins, caused sometimes, maybe, by the wind in the folds of her dress, but more likely by the ingenuity of the wearer, who by a peculiar movement of her foot sends the block forward, to rebound against her unfortunate companion's legs.

## NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

**QUILP.**—Ask a solicitor.  
**DAINTY.**—The wedding finger.  
**JESTER.**—It is entirely a trade matter.  
**NYDIA.**—The song can be had from any music-seller.  
**SOMEBODY'S DARLING.**—A receipt-stamp is necessary.  
**LITTLE JOHN.**—We know nothing of the machine you mention.  
**X. Y. Z.**—The correct pronunciation of Greenwich is *Grin-idge*.  
**ROBY.**—You will get what you require at a theatrical hairdresser's.  
**FRIAR TUCK.**—You will get the information at the nearest police office.  
**BLONDE AND BRUNETTE.**—Any preparation of paraffine will make the hair grow.  
**M. DAY.**—Salt curdles milk and should not be added until the dish is prepared.  
**ROBIN HOOD.**—Too much smoking is very injurious, and likely to stop the growth.  
**APPLE BLOSSOM.**—The word is generally pronounced "Darby." It is impossible to say why.  
**HELIOCTROPE.**—Not knowing the gentleman, we cannot possibly offer an opinion on the subject.  
**HYACINTH.**—1. The white hyacinth means unobtrusive. 2. Your letter is well expressed and written.  
**STANLEY.**—A person legally divorced and without any restraining clause is free to marry again at once.  
**ANXIOUS READER.**—You had better have nothing more to do with a man who gives you such bad advice.  
**FRID.**—Nuttall's Dictionary is considered to be the best now-a-days; the price is about four shillings.  
**JEMIE.**—It is quite true that the bees are informed of a wedding in Derbyshire and their hives decorated.  
**LAVINIA.**—Marriage between first cousins is legal. Whether it is advisable or not you should know best.  
**ROSE AND THISTLE.**—The *Six* or the *Stage* would be the best medium for an advertisement such as you want.  
**MARGARET.**—There are no cosmetics like soap and water and fresh air; a healthy complexion needs no others.  
**HERMIONE.**—There is no need to be despairing for a good many years yet. You are not an old maid by any means.  
**ROSE.**—You can be taught type-writing at small cost. It is coming to the front very much now as an employment for girls.  
**SUSAN NIPPER.**—You will get the rules by applying at a hospital, or writing to the secretary. The authorities are very strict.  
**AN ANXIOUS MOTHER.**—We can hardly advise you. A mother should be able to guide her son in such matters as you mention.  
**MAID MARION.**—1. Many young ladies are engaged at that age. 2. Mary, from the Hebrew, means a drop of salt water or a tear.  
**REYLAU.**—The man appears to have no claim upon the goods; but your best plan will be to consult a solicitor and take his advice.  
**KIT.**—You write a beautiful hand. As far as penmanship is concerned, no one need be afraid to entrust business books to you.  
**DIMPLES.**—You had better write to the editor of one of the papers exclusively devoted to fashions. Drees is rather out of our province.  
**J. C. S. F. S.**—You are short, but there is an old proverb which says, "Precious goods are in small parcels." Think of that and be content.  
**TITANIA.**—Young ladies always wait to be wooed, and do not make their sentiments for young men public until they are asked for them.  
**FAIRY.**—It is rude to stop and converse with anyone when you have a friend with you without introducing her to the person meeting you.  
**DOLLY.**—Sailors sometimes wear earrings. It is a ridiculous affectation for any man in ordinary life to adorn himself with such things.  
**MILADI.**—You should speak to the gentleman at least once, if only to apologise for having done anything so extremely vulgar and unladylike.  
**CLARENCE.**—You had better leave your nose alone. It is as nature made it, and to endeavour to alter it would most likely disfigure you very much.  
**SELINA.**—You are not too young to try the stage; but we should not advise it unless you have friends to help you forward, or the means of proper tuition.  
**JOCK.**—We should advise you to pause before you do anything so rash. You could hardly expect a marriage brought about by such means to turn out well.  
**BEATRICE.**—1. Clear boiling water will remove fruit and tea stains. 2. Ripe tomatoes will remove ink and other stains from white cloth and also from the hands.  
**MARJORIE MAY.**—You can do nothing with kid gloves that have burst. You say that you bought them too small; in that case, you can hardly expect any other result from forcing your hands into them.

**CORA.**—Ask the matron of the nearest hospital; she will give you the necessary information, and most likely make some inquiry into your fitness and capability for such a post.

**SWEET VIOLET.**—Many young ladies marry at nineteen. It is rather young perhaps, but "circumstances alter cases," and it may be expedient sometimes to settle early in life.

**A. MILES.**—No one can be quite sure, but M. Boucher, a French scientist, expresses the opinion that the sardine is a young fish which has not attained its full development.

**INNOCENCE.**—Your parents are your best advisers on such an important point. Our opinion is that you should not be thinking of love or marriage for a good many years to come.

**EGG-SHELLS.**—You had better apply to a medical man. All your questions show that you must be in an unsatisfactory state of health, and we never attempt to give medical advice.

**COLLIE.**—Violins vary in price like any other musical instrument. You had better make your inquiries at a good music-seller's. The instrument is not especially difficult to learn.

**MR. QUIRE.**—1. A girl is under the control of her parents till she is twenty-one years of age. 2. Margaret, from the German, means a peril; Joseph, from the Hebrew, addition.

**INCONSOLEABLE.**—Your wisest plan will be to have your parents till she is twenty-one years of age. 2. Margaret, from the German, means a peril; Joseph, from the Hebrew, addition.

**ELVIRA.**—Put the man out of your head and forget all about him as soon as possible; he means you no good. Tell your parents at once of his conduct if he ever addresses you again.

## FIDELITY.

If a prince should come and cast him down  
 (Believe me, my dear, for I cannot change,  
 And call me his queen, and I give me his crown  
 For the love of me, would you think it strange  
 That I'd still be true, my love, to you,  
 Tho' a thousand princes should come to woo?

If an angel should come and clasp my hand  
 (You may trust me, dear, thro' all coming time,  
 And make me the queen of some far-off land,  
 I would not be queen of his sun-lit dimes  
 For a single year, for I sadly fear  
 The Queen's heart would break for you, my dear.

Should I cross the river of death to-night  
 (Have faith, my dear, for my love cannot die,  
 My heart would thrill with a strange delight  
 Tho' the waves were cold and the billows high,  
 And I would not shrink could I only think  
 You were waiting for me by the river's brink.

While our souls are still in the scales of fate  
 (Ah! pray, my dear, pray with all your heart,  
 Tho' eternity's night may come soon or late,  
 Tho' the ages that come, we may not part,  
 And I would not moan tho' life were gone,  
 If you clasp thro' the darkness my hand in your  
 OWN.

L. M. D.

**LAMBERT.**—There are about five hundred thousand more women than men in England and Scotland. In Ireland the excess is not nearly so great in proportion to the entire population.

**ANXIOUSLY WAITING.**—If the man had a wife living at the time of his marriage with the lady, the ceremony was illegal, and she is not his wife, and therefore free to marry whom she pleases.

**POLLY FLINDERS.**—Anyone may adopt a child if the parents are willing to give it up; it is a matter of private arrangement. It is only in cases of baby-farming that the law interferes.

**WORRIED BESSIE.**—Cockroaches may be got rid of by the use of spirits of turpentine. Apply it with a feather to their haunts of retreat, or put a little in a saucer and let it stand in the closet over night.

**LADY BONNE.**—The true pronunciation of any language cannot be learned from a book; all else may be mastered, and the rest will come very quickly to a person thoroughly versed in every part of the study.

**GIPSY.**—1. Think less yourself and more of others, and you will forget to blush. 2. Alfred, from the Saxon, means good counsellor; Dorothy, from the Greek, gift of Heaven; Eve, Hebrew, life-giving; Matilda, German, a heroine.

**JUMBO.**—There is no way of obtaining the information you want unless you have some clue. There may be persons in the neighbourhood where your brother was last heard of still; but fifteen years is a long time, and the chance is slight.

**HOTSUP.**—We can hardly imagine anyone refusing to aid his mother who is so circumstanced. The very fact of their standing alone in the world, as it were, should make the tie stronger between them than between happier mothers and sons.

**JUANITA.**—Highly perfumed writing-paper is very unpleasant; if it is scented at all it should only have a faint odour. You cannot do it successfully with any scent that you will buy, but any perfumer will scent your paper for you exactly as you wish.

**TRIBULATION.**—Your best plan would be to ask the doctor who has been treating for your sad malady to help you in getting what you want. A surgical instrument maker might also be able to tell you where to obtain it.

**ELFINELLA.**—1. You must make up your quarrel for yourself. You hardly seem to have known the gentleman long enough for there to be anything very serious between you. 2. Fair-haired persons are not generally considered what you call "common-looking."

**H. A. P.**—1. Eggs do not agree with all persons; but they are generally considered wholesome. 2. See answer to "Dimple." 3. There is no rule, in some cases a simple bow is sufficient. In others, a warmer greeting is appropriate. It must depend on circumstances.

**BRITANNIA.**—1. Eating meat does not necessarily make anyone coarse. 2. Girls in the situation you speak of would rank as equals. 3. Vaseline is not injurious to the skin. 4. No, but it will injure your health, and is a very nasty habit besides. 5. You write very neatly and well.

**JULIE.**—We always try to advise young girls not to rush into the life of an actress without qualification or friends to help them on. But with a little money to start with, and not too great an opinion of your own powers, together with the help and advice of a good teacher, it is possible to take a very fair place in the ranks and to earn a good and respectable living.

**LEAH KOOER.**—Do not answer any man who speaks to you in the street and the annoyance will soon cease; if it does not, tell the nearest policeman. If any of your fellow-workers with whom you are not acquainted wish you good-night, a simple bend of the head in return is sufficient if you do not desire any further knowledge of them, but it would be rude not to notice such a natural act of politeness.

**HUMPTY-DUMPTY.**—Stammering can be cured, unless it arises from some defect in the formation of the mouth and throat, and we have endeavored to point out how it may be done before in these columns. Practice speaking slowly and distinctly when alone, and repeat the sentences over and over again until you can manage to speak them without stammering. It only requires a little perseverance and a determination to overcome the difficulty.

**CHARACTER.**—People who laugh in a broad Latin "A" are open-hearted, honest, fond of noisy jollity, but perhaps of voluble mood. Excessive jerking laughter, however, is an evidence of vulgarity. Those laughing in a dry "A" are respectable, but little expansive, and a hard lot of people. When the Latin "B" prevails, there prevails also a phlegmatic, melancholy temper. Timorous, uneasy people, also those imbued with melancholy, always laugh in a kind of swelling "I." Laughter in "O" is the utterance of proud, bold, imperative, somewhat bantering people. Beware of those that laugh in "oo" (o). They are traitors, haters, scorners.

**BRAVE HEART.**—Nobody seems to know whose business it is to provide the carriages at a wedding, and nearly everybody fancies that it is the bridegroom. Yet it is more than twenty years since it was etiquette for him to do so. The bridegroom only provides the carriage in which he and his bride drive from the church to the house where the breakfast is to take place, and afterwards from the house to the railway station. The bride is driven to the church in her father's carriage. Her father accompanies her, her mother and sisters precede her to the church. If the bride has no father, her mother would drive to the church with her. The invited guests provide their own carriages, and neither the bride's father nor the bridegroom are expected to do so.

**W. BARTON.**—The new steamship *Turonic* has made the fastest maiden voyage on record—six days, fourteen hours, and thirty-three minutes—and now that the *Great Eastern* is virtually no more she is the longest vessel afloat. She is 583 feet long, 57 feet 6 inches broad, 89 feet 4 inches deep, and has a gross tonnage of 9,685 tons. She has a cutter stem, and, relying wholly on her two sets of engines, the masts are little more than three bare poles without yards. She can accommodate 300 first-class, 150 second, and 750 steerage passengers. Her promenade deck is 245 feet long. Her engines have been constructed to develop 17,000 horse-power, and the propellers are 21 feet 6 inches in diameter. The port propeller is a left-handed screw, and the starboard a right-handed; thus both work away from the ship, and the port propeller working away in the loose water of the after-screw makes two revolutions a minute more than its twin. The boilers are twelve in number, with six furnaces in each.

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††† We cannot undertake to return rejected manuscripts.

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